

Believer by rstarisk

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst, Depression, Enemies to Friends to Lovers, F/M, Fluff, Friendship, Getting to know, Implied Suicide Attempt, Implied/Referenced Self-Harm, M/M, Major time hop, PTSD, Slow Build, Slow Burn

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Chief Jim Hopper, Eleven, Jane, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, William "Will" Byers

Relationships: Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington, Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair, Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler

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Summary:

Steve wants peace but after everything that has happened, between his relationship with Nancy, Billy and college, Steve is starting to think that he's stuck. It may not be the Upside Down but he thinks it's definitely hell.

Billy is starting to see things in a different light. He gets a taste of the hell Steve has been stuck in.

1. Attention

Author's Note:

I've watched Stranger Things twice. I find Steve and Billy's dynamic really fun. In some world, I'd like to think that they could be good friends if only Billy tried a little harder.

The goal here is to give an in depth description about things that haunt Steve and Billy. I just think that that they'd be good friends one way or another. Might probably write Dark!Steve if I have the brain cells to do so hehe-

I'm not that good but I will try. I'm also not consistent with updating because college is taking up most of my time.

update as of July 1

I'm sorry for not updating. Chapter 9 is half-way done months ago but college and people really suck which ate my time. I'm not sure when I'll be able to update soon because being in a trimesteral school sucks the life out of me.

Steve thought that he could get some peace after their tiring battle with the Mind Flayer. He thought that things would go back to the usual or even better. But the odds weren't in his favor after the whole incident. He was back to being alone, girlfriend-less and feeling utterly defeated while nursing a bust up face all thanks to Billy Hargrove. Thankfully enough, his parents weren't around to question his appearance.

That night, Mrs. Henderson had called him to ask if he could drive Dustin to the Snow Ball. Steve knew their lack of automobile so he agreed to it. Somehow, it made him feel excited to get out of his house and see a familiar face. He wondered what Dustin would look like for tonight's event. Steve couldn't help but be a little happy as he

start his Beamer on and drove to the Henderson's house.

After everything that happened to him, Steve tried to be positive about most things. Even if eating and merely laying around were painful for him, he'd always contradict himself that it could be worse. As he pulled up in front of Dustin's house, he got a tugging feeling in his gut. He was actually nervous about tonight. All the while he stayed at home, his mind was flooded with thoughts about the night Billy Hargrove came to the Byer's residence unannounced. He could remember what it felt like to be hero and at the same time to be a loser. He paled in comparison to Billy. Of course he got himself beat up but that was all for a good cause. He didn't want Billy going near and hurting the kids, especially on his watch.

"Hey. " Dustin smiled. He helped himself in the passenger seat.

"Whoa look at you. " Steve beams. "So handsome! "

"Oh my god, Steve don't. I had enough of the doting tone for one night okay? Mom wouldn't stop calling me handsome, now you too?

" Dustin snorts.

"Hey, can't I be proud of my little man? Bet you'll drive those girls crazy later. " Steve snickers.

They drove off with the usual banter. Steven couldn't feel any better than spending quality time with the kid. He was such a gem and he noticed it too late.

There were a few kids lingering outside the gym doors, probably nervous just like Dustin. At the sight of middle school gym, Dustin looks at Steve for assurance.

"Hey, you look amazing okay? Your hair is amazing." Steve pats him on the shoulder.

"Thanks Steve. " Dustin does his signature growl and Steve's smile falters. He shakes his head at it.

"Don't do that. "

"Okay. "

"Go! Go have fun. " Steve urges Dustin to get out of his car with a grin.

"Okay. " this time Dustin gives him a genuine smile that makes Steve's heart swell a bit.

Not a moment too soon, Dustin makes his way inside. Steve catches a glance of Nancy serving punch to the kids. He wished he was in there too but ever since the events that took place the past few days, they have agreed to keep each other some space. Besides, Steve and Nancy had unofficially ended things with one another. He knew that Nancy's feelings had shifted to someone else and Steve couldn't bring himself to say it out loud. At the back of his mind, he deserved it.

Even the stinging on his face, yeah he deserved that too.

He drives to the parking lot and stays there, probably wait for the Dustin to emerge from the gym's front doors in a few hours. He didn't have anything to do that night anyways. No plans to execute and no friends to hang out with. The only high school friend he had left were both volunteering in the dance. He would have volunteered too if not for the bruises Billy Hargrove left on his face. His jaw still pained him but it wasn't as bad as the first three days in bed rest. Everything ached. His body screamed murder after all the adrenaline had ran out. In those three days, he stayed in his all too big house alone. He wasn't even sure anymore if it was a blessing or a curse to be in a big house. Just like Dustin, he was an only child which meant he spent most of his time alone. Steve wished for someone to talk to at least. Everyone was too busy being with someone else.

Billy stood outside the middle school gym doors, watching as Max grouped with the nerds. It only occurred to him that Max never really smiled around his presence and seeing her smile with the other kids made him realize what a huge asshole he was. Not that he can help it though. It was his brand even back in California. He was known as the resident bad boy and he was quite proud holding that title. But here in Hawkins, there was the title King which was reserved to none other than Steve Harrington. Ever since Billy stepped in this small town, he wanted that title for himself. But with each passing day he stayed, he realized that it was a stupid title that Steve can keep. Title or not, he still got the bitches he wanted.

As he made his way back to the middle school parking lot to retrieve his car, he notices a maroon Beamer parked at the darkest part of the lot and he knew who owned that Beamer. Only one person owned

that kind of crap.

With nothing else to do, Billy made his way to Steve's car, smirking as he got closer. There was something about Steve that compels him.

He was about to knock at the glass window when he noticed Steve sitting at the passenger seat in a fatal position. His back was on Billy and the blond had no idea what was going on but basing from his position, Steve didn't look good. Was it a good time to mess with Harrington or should Billy just leave the guy alone?

Again, Billy liked messing with the guy for some reason.

Billy knocked hard on the glass window which got Steve jumping in his seat. The brunette turns around, squinting at his offender. With a sigh, Steve kicks the door open and wraps his arms around himself as he rounds his car to stand in front of Billy. Unlike Billy, Steve still sported a busted lip and a bruised cut on his temple. Billy felt bad for a moment but then remembered that it wasn't the first time Steve received a beating like his. Tommy was just as noisy as his girlfriend Carol and soon enough, Billy practically knew Steve Harrington.

"What the hell do you want, Hargrove? " Steve was clearly not in the mood.

"What's got your panties in a knot? Just came to say hi. " Billy smirked, waiting for a reaction. Steve just scoffed. This was dumb.

"Wow should I be grateful? " Steve shakes his head, leaning against the door of his car to make himself comfortable. "Last time I checked, I'm the last person you want to see. "

"Yeah and no. I'll be honest with you man. " Billy stands in one foot, takes a cigarette from his jacket and lights it, placing the cancer stick between his lips as he stared at Steve hard. "You seemed cool. I thought you were cool. You got me curious. Who is this King Steve everyone's been talking about? Hell, when I saw your hair I knew why. " Billy laughs lowly. "You got the money, the car, kind of- " Steve makes a noise at the back of his throat. "You got one of the gems. Nancy Wheeler was it? Yeah so I thought, let's see what's so great about this King Steve. I wanted to know what makes you tick. And guess what. " Billy shakes his head in amusement, blowing smoke out his mouth rudely. "I saw it that night in the Byers' house. Where did that Steve go? Where has he been hiding all this time? I've

only seen the disappointing Steve.”

Steve sighs, running his hands on his numbing face. Memories of that night came flooding back in his mind like a tidal wave. He had been trying to forget that night but it was futile for it what kept him up at night. He really didn't like the feeling of being violent around the kids but Billy was a threat and Steve's protective instincts just kicked in.

“You know what, Hargrove. “ Steve takes a step forward. Billy keeps his feet planted and raises his chin. “Whatever you're trying to get at, it won't work. You came too late to see me reign. If you want the title, be my guest. There are other things I worry about other than that shit. You wouldn't understand what I've been through since he have your head up in your ass so can you please just drop it? “

Both teens stared at each other intensely. Blue meets brown. If they were in better circumstances, Steve would have thought how pretty Billy's eyes were but all it reminded him was the fear of being beat again.

“I don't care about the title, Harrington. I don't want to be the top dog in this shitty town. When I see something I want, I get it. “ at this point, Billy was poking a finger rather hard against Steve's chest it actually stung. Steve just groaned in disgust.

“What the fuck do you even want from me? Having fun messing with me, is that it? “

“Maybe. “ Billy shrugs, blowing the last of his smoke on Steve's face before stumping down on the remains of his cigarette. “Like I said, I get what I want. “

“Fuck off. “ Billy simply grins.

“You're cute when you're upset. “ Steve made gagging noises. Was this guy for real?

“For a moment there, you sounded like have a crush on me. “

Billy makes a face at this. Just the reaction Steve was waiting for.

“Fuck Harrington, I don't swing that way. “

“Then stay the fuck away from me Hargrove. Stay away from my friends. So much as you lay a hand on them, you'll pay. You don't know the things I could do. You don't know that things Nancy can do

or what Jonathan can. If I were you, I'd keep a safe distance. " with that, Steve opens the door of his car and ignites it to life, giving Billy one last glare before driving away.

Billy watched as he drove away, a flame suddenly pooling at the pit of his stomach. To him, that sounded like a challenge and Billy loved challenges. He liked winning and he knew he can win this one. Whatever it takes, he'd do everything to see the flame in Steve's eyes once again.

There was just so much mystery surrounding Steve that attracts Billy.

He must uncover these for his own satisfaction and he had an idea how.

2. Bad at this

Summary for the Chapter:

Things get a little aggressive between Billy and Steve.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hey would you look at that, I've updated faster than I usually do hehe! Anyways, I will apologize in advance if there are some typos. I've been writing this while doing reports for my classes.

The winter chill came earlier this year. For once, Billy and Max agreed on something: they hate the chill in Hawkins. the both of them lounged in the living room where the heater was on. Billy was lifting barbels like he usually does while Max sat in front of the TV, flipping through channels. A few days before, Neil and Susan had left to fix some papers about Susan's divorce which meant Billy and Max were on their own for the following days to come. Billy liked the freedom but he realized that he still had to look after Max despite the little shit getting into his nerves.

But there was an unspoken rule between them. They respected each other to an extent that Billy would agree to drive her to the Wheeler's house all for the sake of having the rest of the day to himself. Max would keep her business to herself unless it involved her friends but sometimes, being a pre-teen, she couldn't help asking Billy about his beef with Steve for that night at the Byers ' house.

“Pretty simple. “ Billy breathes out, placing the barbels on the floor as he sat down the couch to rest his sore body. “You left. Dad got mad and all the shit. Promised Susan to bring you home. I find Steve lying about your whereabouts when I could clearly see you dipshits at the window. That makes Steve a liar right? And what is he doing

in a creep house with four kids? What the fuck were you guys doing? “ Max remains speechless. “and you know how I hate liars. “ Billy hisses out. He grabs his pack of cigarettes and takes his leave.

Max watches him leave. She desperately wished that things weren't like this for them. They were both born the only child in their previous families and Susan meeting Neil gave her a possibility to have a sibling.

The first time they met, it was awkward as hell. Billy had skipped class that day to pick her up at her old school. Max was so excited to meet her brother-in-law ever since Susan showed photos of Billy. He looked really cool and Max had a good feeling about him. But she was wrong the moment they actually met.

It was a little past three in the afternoon when Billy came to pick her up. His blue Camaro came in the parking lot all of sudden, drawing all the attention from kids her age. As he stepped out, heads turned to watch him, as if he was a magnificent sight for sore eyes. Max felt proud at some point. Billy was attractive and she was happy to be related to him... in a way. She liked the attention she got after the whole school knew who the hot blond was picking up. For a while, they actually worked out on their differences.

But now that they were in Hawkins, she wanted nothing to do with Billy. He was a bully, an asshole and a maniac. That was putting it lightly. She knew what Billy was capable of and if she hadn't intervene that night when Billy was beating the hell out of Steve, Steve might have been sent to the hospital for broken limbs. Billy was that aggressive and Max didn't want to get into his bad side. God knows how traumatic it was for her to keep her brother-in-law's temper at bay. Sometimes she even wonders if Billy really had his screws undone.

._*._

Steve finds himself staring at the lunch tray. The lady serving food had added a little extra on his plate again after commenting that he was looking thinner. To Steve, he was always thin. Nancy once joked that he looked like a bean pole and Steve couldn't argue with her. He was indeed a bean pole. A handsome bean pole. The idea got him smiling. Oh how he missed his small banters with Nancy. He wished she was sitting with him, instead she was with Jonathan in the library doing whatever.

See, Steve had already picked up that something had happened between the two of them. If last year he found them a weird combo, now he thinks they looked like the perfect couple. What happens to Steve then? He became a nobody. He starts to wonder when that had started to happen. Maybe it was that night when he brought Nancy into that party where she got too drunk to even remember the things she told him. It hurt of course, the pain still lingered, but at the back of Steve's mind, he couldn't help but blame himself for what happened to Barb. As Nancy puts it, he was bullshit.

That left a bitter taste in his mouth. Why was he putting himself down so much?

“Hey. “

The sudden intrusion of Billy's voice snaps Steve from his thoughts. He watches the blond sit in front of him as if they were close friends.

“You look better. “ Billy comments, taking a huge bite of his sandwich.

“What are you doing here? I thought I told you to stay away from me. “ Steve scoffs, grabbing his can of coke to take a sip. Throughout his day, all he had been doing was drinking coke.

“Well, you look like your food is offending you and I wanted to watch up close. Also, there are no more seats. Is bad to take the ones available? “ Billy snorts. He notices how Steve hasn’t touched his plate and it was mildly concerning. Living with Neil had taught him to be observant of things around him. Things like these. Untouched food usually means bad for Billy but he doesn’t voice this out. Instead he waits for Steve to eat. Steve just sighs.

“Tch whatever Hargrove. Do whatever you want. “ it was weird that Billy was paying attention to him. It actually felt nice that someone was there. Most of the people in Steve’s life were busy with someone else and it had left him quite lonely. Though he really didn’t expect it to be Billy Hargrove. The guy still keeps him on edge.

“Where’s your friends? “ Billy takes another bite of his sandwich, eyes training on Steve as the other poke his mashed potatoes boredly.

“Probably eating lunch too. In the middle school cafeteria. “ This makes Billy howl in laughter. Heat runs through Steve’s cheeks as he realized how sad that sounded.

“You mean those nerds? You’ve really hit rock bottom did you? “ Steve just looked away. He really did hit rock bottom but he wouldn’t admit that. He still had some pride left in him.

“There you are Billy! “

Suddenly, there was an addition of Tommy and Carol in Steve’s sight. Seeing his old friends made him bite his cheek. Did he really associated himself with people like Tommy before? To him, Tommy and Carol were the epitome of asshole and bitch. Being with them also made you one. It was an unspoken rule and seeing as Billy hangs

out with them, it made Billy an asshole too. Which he was already even before they befriended the current most attractive man in high school.

“What are you doing with this loser? “ Tommy snickers. Carol rolls her eyes at Steve as she takes a sip of whatever was inside her tumbler. Sitting around them was already making the hair on Steve’s arm stiffen. He really didn’t like their company anymore. It made him remember of the times he couldn’t stand by Nancy.

“I wa- “

“Just leaving. “ Steve cuts in. He stands up from his seat and leaves abruptly.

This makes Billy’s brow’s meet. Tommy was always such a pain in the ass. Just when he was making progress (he thinks), the asshole just had to ruin the moment. Thinking about how swiftly Steve had left got Billy’s blood boiling.

He always gets what he wants.

Steve was one of those. Sighing, Billy shoves Tommy away from him and takes his leave too, prompting to search for Steve in hopes of picking up from where they left off. When he turned to his right, to where Steve’s locker was located, he sees Steve talking with a red-head a few inches shorter than him. She was one of those cute red-heads that greeted him the first day, Stacey, he thinks. Billy watches as the girl looks up at Steve dreamily, books against her chest, while Steve return the same look. They were flirting that’s for sure because Steve had this dumb look in his face that Billy hated seeing. The only time Steve had made that face was when talked that Wheeler girl and seeing it again repulsed him.

“It’s a Friday night Steve, you should totally go to my party! I haven’t seen you in action for months. “ Stacey pouts.

“I’m not so sure... “ Steve says playfully before chuckling. “Okay why not? I got nothing to do tonight anyway. “

“Yeah. I’ll keep you warm if you’re worried about the chill. “ she winks. This just causes Steve’s smile to widen.

“Gotcha Stace, I’ll be there. “

“Great! “ She tip toes and lands a kiss on his cheek. “See you later Stevie! “ she says as she made her way to class.

Steve makes a turn to leave when he sees Billy staring holes at him. What’s with this guy? Why does he pop up in the weirdest time? To avoid further tension, Steve goes the other way despite having the same class with Billy that afternoon. Hargrove was starting to be a pain in the ass these days. There was a tension that lingered around them as Steve took his usual seat at the middle of the class. That day, Billy decided it was a nice day to sit behind Steve which got the other teen on edge again. Seriously, what’s the problem now? The whole algebra class was spent looking straight ahead. Steve ignored the world mostly but knowing that someone was staring from behind you unnerved him. He couldn’t concentrate on their topic with the thought of Billy Hargrove concocting a way to make his life miserable this basketball practice. Billy was always beating his ass in basketball practice that Steve even considers to skip practice today just to get away from the other teen.

As soon as the bell rang, Steve shoots up from his seat and beelines for the door. He ignored everyone who greeted him to get to his car. Fear was slowly making its way into his chest at the thought of Billy chasing him. He could feel it. The heat of the other following him from behind that he wasn’t even surprised to see the blond corner him against the door of his car.

“Where you headin ‘ Harrington? “ there was a hiss in Billy’s voice that Steve was never going to get used to. The guy would always take him by surprise.

“H-home...? Fuck off, let go of my car Hargrove. “ Steve tried to fight back but he underestimates Billy’s strength. For a moment, they just stared into each others eyes, waiting for one of them to back down.

“Practice starts in a few minutes, *princess*. “ Steve glares but Billy had his wrist on a vice grip which was starting to hurt. Why must everything be difficult between the two of them?

“Ah.. I really don’t plan on attending practice today or the days to... “ Steve took a deep breathe with how intense Billy was staring at him. The guy clearly didn’t want a no for an answer.

“Scared that I’ll beat our ass I court today? “ Taunted Billy. Of course, this wasn’t exactly the reason why he was on Steve like a leech. He was at the part of his day where he wanted to push Steve’s buttons.

“As if.” Steve pushes him away, actually standing his ground this time unlike their previous encounters.

“Then show me today that you’re not such of a wimp as I- we all thought you are Harrington! “ There was that crazed smile on Billy’s lips. It was kind of alluring but Steve wanted nothing more but to punch that pretty face.

“If I win today, stay the fuck away, is that clear Hargrove? “

“As you wish, princess. “ Steve grunts.

He pushed Billy out of his way and bounds to they gym full of determination to kick the asshole’s butt on court.

Not too long, they both of them are on court throwing each other dirty glances. Steve hasn't been in basketball as of late. All those late night anxiety has worn him out too much to function properly in practice but today was kind of an exception. He wanted the stupid blond mullet-head to stop pestering him. Billy was not a person Steve wanted to be in his life in a daily basis.

Today was no exception for Billy's rough housing. Shirt long discarded, the blond moved with agility no one can come close to unlike Steve. The two had thrown each other on the floor too many times today that their coach was starting to have a migraine. The both of them were too hyper aware of each other's presence that they couldn't simply be friendly on court.

It was during the three minutes of the practice game that things got a little too heated. Billy had been shoving Steve around too much that he miscalculated and elbowed Steve at the chest in mid-air. Pain shot through Steve's body in an instant. It starts from his chest then his head which hits the floor boards rather harshly. Everyone around him cheered as Billy scored for the win but Steve couldn't care less since his ears started to ring. There were black splotches in his vision and for a while there, he thought he was going to pass out. Suddenly, there were warm bodies around him yet he couldn't recognize any with how much his brain was pounding against his skull.

The last thing Steve could remember was cold hands against his face before completely falling unconscious.

Nancy sat at the spare chair close to where Steve was laying unconscious. Jonathan was also with her, sitting at the opposite side

of Steve's bed with their bags together. The both of them shared worried looks as Steve remained unconscious for the second hour. The nurse had told them to take Steve home once he wakes up so he could get better rest yet the brunette wasn't showing any signs of coming to.

Nancy still felt the blood on her face boil at the thought of Billy Hargrove hurting Steve. This wasn't the first time the guy had put Steve into bed rest and Nancy was getting tired of the blond's childishness. It wasn't tolerable anymore since Steve kept getting hurt for Billy's selfish reasons. Seeing the teen on the court standing over Steve's unconscious one, Nancy couldn't help but punch Billy square on the jaw. It hurt her knuckles but it hurt more to see Steve unmoving and obviously hurt again. Satisfaction ran through her chest when she saw Billy's bleeding lip. Everyone expected Billy to retaliate but for once, the mullet-head hung his head low and remained silent as if he took responsibility of his fault. If only Jonathan wasn't there to stop here, Nancy would have made more damage but Steve was more important than some jerk who finds satisfaction in hurting people. Nancy wasn't like that. She wouldn't stoop to Billy's level just to get even. She always considered herself the bigger person.

Suddenly, Steve groans.

Both Jonathan and Nancy approach him, watching as almond eyes open.

"Ow shit, my head... what happened? " Steve croaked, pressing his palm against his temple in hopes of lessening the throbbing of his head.

"Billy knocked the wind out of you during practice which made you

hit your head on the ground quite hard you got a concussion. “ Jonathan says.

“That asshole... “ Steve pulls himself up and cried in pain. His head was killing him.

“Do you want us to take you home? It’s getting pretty late Steve. We can stay at your house for a while if you want. “ Nancy proposes. She was really worried for Steve’s well-being.

“I... I think I just need to get my bearings and I’ll be alright in a while. I made plans for tonight and I don’t want to disappoint. “ Nancy cocks an eyebrow at the mention of plans.

“Is it more important than your health Steve? “ Nancy didn’t like the idea of Steve going anywhere tonight. With that concussion, Steve could get into an accident.

For a while, Steve had no answer for her. He knows he was being reckless if he continued with his plan tonight but it had been a while since he went to a party on Friday. He was so caught up with Nancy’s plans in the past that now, when they’re no longer together, Steve had no idea of who he is. Despite the throbbing pain in his head, Steve still wanted to go to that party, just to feel normal for a while. Because that’s what he needed after all the crazy times he had spent with their group. Steve just needed a moment of clarity and this was one of those opportunities.

“Nance... I’m going to be okay. I’m a big boy now. “ Steve chuckles, hoping it would sway Nancy to get off his back. Besides, Nancy didn’t have a say in his decisions anymore.

“What if Billy was there to whatever and wherever you’re going to tonight? The psycho keeps hurting you Steve! He’s a threat not only to the kids but to you as well. I don’t even know why he’s so fixated on you. “

Steve watches as Nancy worry over him. It would have been nice to live in this moment forever, for Nancy to pay attention to him, to worry about him and maybe, to take care of him. It was a lingering feeling Steve craved for. Maybe, just maybe, Nancy still felt the same way about him but there was no way in knowing. All Steve had were hints here and there that their relationship was going no where. He thought, he *hoped*, that deep inside Nancy, she wanted this too. It was foolish to think that Steve was the only one waiting. Didn't Nancy feel anything when they were together or was she just caught up in the moment of having King Steve by her side?

"Hey, I'm a grown person Nancy. I can do this. You and Jonathan should go home or some shit. Jonathan here looks so antsy. " Steve teases him, making Jonathan flustered in his seat with a small smile on his lips.

"This is why we like Steve. " Jonathan reminisces that time in Murray's hideout. Steve then laughs out loud.

"Aw buddy I didn't know you liked me! " Nancy rolls her eyes while the two boys chuckle-snort at the joke. "Hey, holler at me if you get bored, alright buddy? " Steve winks. It causes Jonathan to laugh harder.

"God Steve- " Nancy laughs along, landing a soft punch on Steve's arm. "You sound like your old self already. I guess we'll go now. Take care okay? "

"I will. " Steve says softly.

Nancy kisses his cheek and they leave. A sigh escapes Steve's lips.

It'll keep getting harder, will it?

A heaviness settles in Steve's chest as he grabs his bag and struggles

to walk out the infirmary. He makes it to his Beamer without falling down but it felt like his skull was being crushed into a million pieces. Just what the hell happened to him today? One moment he was feeling the adrenaline in his veins and the next he's in the infirmary bed.

He shoves his bag at the back seat and sits in the driver seat with a groan. His head was killing him, literally. Should he really be driving right now? But the thought interested him. The thought that he might get into a car crash. He played a few scenes in his mind as he sat there in the chill of Hawkins. His parents won't be there even if he crashed. It'd take them a few days at least and Nancy would be there crying and probably blaming herself for allowing him to drive home that night.

Steve smiled at the thought. He wished someone cared more about him. He wished his parents were there more often. He wished he had more genuine friends other than Nancy and Jonathan. He was starting to think he was a third wheel in their group of friends. Even the kids had something going on their lives. Steve? He still had that essay to send for college applications but never finding the motivation to make it. There was too much going in his mind to think straight to the point it keeps him up at night. If it doesn't, it wakes him up on ungodly hours. It never felt safe in his house anymore after realizing that Barbara was killed in their pool, hypothetically.

With another sigh, Steve ignites his car into life. He prayed to any god out there he gets home in one piece to change and go to that party afterwards. He also prayed that Billy wasn't going to be there.

Oh how he prayed but they were never heard.

Notes for the Chapter:

I expect me to make the next chapter with more flare.

I can't promise but I will try to make it.

3. Open road

Summary for the Chapter:

Steve pushes himself and it doesn't end well for him.

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry it took a while! I got sick in between writing and balancing studies :(I had to focus on my case a lot so I didn't have time to write even on my phone. I usually sleep when I get home

It had been a challenge for Steve to drive back home and to Stacey's party while nursing a concussion. It had only been a few hours after his blow on the head but he convinced himself that this wasn't the worst of it.

So he went anyway, totally unsure if this was safe for him. Steve just wanted to feel like a normal teenager again. The last time he had actually gone to a party was the night Nancy called him bullshit. The night that Steve realized that to some people, he was really just a pretty face. With his head hung low, Steve gets out of his car with a sigh. He pulled his bomber jacket closer as he he walked to the party that had started long ago. Steve saw familiar faces. Faces that gave him dirty looks as he casually goes in to search for the host. It doesn't take him long to find Stacey.

She was standing a few feet away from the pool, holding a cup of whatever as she chatted away with her guests. Among these guests were Billy Hargroves, the only person Steve didn't want to see that night. The blond smiled and laughed with their little group. Steve felt repulsed. He was ready to bolt out and come up with an excuse when Billy howled at the sight of him.

"If it isn't Harrington! Finally came to join us? " Steve hated hearing Billy's voice at that moment. It made his head hurt with how loud the guy was being. With a grimace, Steve approaches and offers a smile. "Can't say no to a personal invitation, can I? " Stacey casually gives Steve her cup of alcohol. The brunette takes a sip, taking another

until he drinks all it's content.

"How's your head? " Billy asks all of a sudden. Which was weird since Billy caused it.

"How's your lip? " Steve scoffs. He wasn't in the mood to be friendly. Billy's reaction was expected. Billy clicks his tongue and looks away, quite pissed.

Steve couldn't care less what Billy felt. He was pissed himself too. The whole student body had been laughing at him ever since Billy came to Hawkins. Top it off with the time Jonathan beat his face and literally stole Nancy away from him.

It was humiliating to come back to this scene with a concussion. Despite the pounding in his head, Steve made his way to the table where the drinks were served. He grabbed a cup and drank. Then he took another one and another and another one until he felt his body heat up. This was what it meant to be a teenager in Hawkins, you get shitfaced for no reason at all. But Steve had a reason. He wanted to forget if permitted, he wanted to forget everything and make a new chapter of his life.

Music blared through the expanse of the house. People grinded their bodies against each other, grins and suggestive smirks on their faces. It was weird. Steve almost didn't recognize the scene anymore. It was starting to get suffocating inside that he went back outside. Stacey greets him and instantly sticks to his side. This, this was familiar to him. The feeling of a smaller body against his and the smell of perfume. With a smile, Steve told himself to indulge. He grabs Stacey by the waist and tries to make small talk with most of the people paying attention to him. At the corner of his eye, he can see Billy staring holes into him. The blond had a cigarette between his lips while his blue eyes held their steady gaze at Steve.

It was quite unnerving for Steve to be stared down like down especially by someone who had caused him pain more than once. But thanks to the alcohol in his system, Steve forgot about Billy soon enough. He was laughing and smiling around the people he used to hang out with, minus Tommy and Carol which couldn't be any better. That's when things started to get a little bit hazy for Steve. He remembered smiling, laughing and raising his cup but he never expected to be coming up to the second floor, to Stacey's room.

How did he know? The walls were all floral, the room smelled fragrant and the lights were soft to his bleary eyes. Since Steve was laying on his back, his mind's first idea was to sleep but as soon as he felt weight straddle him, he was fully aware of his surroundings. He forced his eyes wide open to see better. Because of the alcohol's influence, he couldn't focus very well but he knew who it was. As he held his hands out to stop Stacey, the other just grabbed them and pulled his hands against her chest which made Steve jump in surprise. He was not expecting any of this.

"Holy shit! " Steve screamed, he was ready to scramble if not for Stacey holding him down.

"Stay still honey, I'll make you feel good real soon. " said the red-head in a sultry voice.

Steve internally screamed at himself to get up and run but against a girl, who was in any way healthier than him, he was no match. The pounding in his skull reverberated while his joints felt like jelly due to the excessive drinking he was doing that night. He should have known this would happen to him. A part of him was proud that he was still desired for but the new Steve in him felt disgusted. He wanted nothing more than to have fun tonight. Steve groaned in his spot. He tried to pull away but somehow ended up getting shirtless all thanks to Stacey's persistence.

"I'm so glad you and that Wheeler girl had broken up. You know Stevie, I was hurt when you chose that bitch over me. " Stacey ran her delicate hands over Steve, who in turn shuddered, not in a good way. "I have more going on yet you chose Nancy. What gives Steve?"

Finally, Steve pulled away with much concentration. Sweat beaded his temple as he tried to even his breathing from the pounding in his skull.

"I don't care about looks... " Steve gulped, taking deep breathes. "You're such an easy get Stace. " smirked Steve. He knew he was at disadvantage but Steve couldn't help it. This was the old him resurfacing.

"What did you say? " Stacey's voice drops an octave. She looms over him as a hand slowly coil itself around Steve's throat. "Are you

insulting me, Harrington? “

The name sent chills down Steve’s spine. Only one person called him that and Steve wouldn’t let some dumb girl do the same. To Steve, the name calling was reserved to one person only. Besides, he can only let one person do it or else it’d hurt his ego more.

“Are you insulted? “ Despite the grip on his neck tightening, Steve grinned. “So.. Easy. “ Steve croaked. Stacey’s grip only tightens.

“You like getting hurt don’t you? I saw that night you walked out without Nancy. That Byers ‘ guy had to take her home and God knows what happened to them afterwards. You got dumped by a loser. “ Stacey laughs as her grip tightens around his neck even more that Steve found it hard to breathe.

There was a pain everywhere but Steve had one thought at that moment and it was to escape.

With all the strength he could muster, he grabs the red-head’s hand and forces it off his neck. He wheezes as he pulled himself away from Stacey, eyes trying to glare at his offender. Steve willed his migraine to lighten the fuck up but it only got worse to the point his knees gave out. He falls to the ground with a loud thud.

And as if on queue, Billy Hargrove kicks the door open. The blond sees Steve on the floor out cold while Stacey loomed over him, anger washing over her face.

“What the fuck happened here huh? “

Stacey glares daggers at him as she approach him with such feral Billy swore he have seen before.

“None of your business, Billy. “ she hisses. “Steve here just had too much to drink and collapsed. “

“During what... rape? He wouldn’t be laying on the floor if he wanted it too. “ Billy snorts, his gaze never leaving the red-head’s direction.

“Men can’t get raped. “

“Yeah of course. Men can’t be raped by cows. “ Billy howls.

At this point, Stacey is fuming. She steps up to Billy and makes a solid eye contact with him.

“Get out of my house. “

Billy simply gives her a mocking salute but walks past her. He grabs Steve's shirt and carries the unconscious teen on his back easily. Carefully, he walked away from Stacey's sight with Steve warm on his back, as if the guy had a fever. People stared as he made his way down the flight of stairs. This wasn't something Billy would be thrilled about but somehow, he felt good for doing something for Steve's sorry ass.

They reach his Camaro with a little difficulty yet Billy remained careful. He opens the passenger seat and eases Steve in it, shoving the other teen's shirt down his upper body. Then he assessed any damage done to Steve. Billy was looking around Steve's neck when the other opened his almond eyes. There was a tense silence between them, mostly because Steve couldn't see who was in front of him.

“Who're you? “ Steve whispers, eyes squinting to get a better vision.

“Oh come on. “ Billy groans.

“What the fuck. Hargrove? “ Steve also groans with eyes closed. He brings his hands against his face and sighs. “What happened? “

“You got shit faced that's for sure idiot. You're face's all red and sad, wish you could see. “ Billy laughs as he rounds to the driver seat. He sits down on his seat comfortably and lights a cigarette.

“What about Stacey? You didn't hurt her,did you?“

Billy couldn't believe what Steve was asking. His niceness was no joke! It should have been taboo by now but this guy had always had to know. With a sigh, Billy shakes his head and faces Steve, who had face crunched up maybe from the concussion.

“She's fine. You think I'd lay a hand on a girl like her? “ it kinda offended Billy that Steve would think he would stoop that low. Billy would scare but he'd never lay a hand on her, on any female to be exact.

“Well, you aren't exactly a gentleman. “

“And you are? “ he raises an eyebrow. Steve rolls his eyes, at least he tried to.

The both of them sat there in silence. Steve's head hurt too much to even consider going home alone. He even played around the thought of asking Hargrove to take him home but the thought of leaving his car made him nervous. It was the only thing that Steve considered home since his parents were never around.

"I guess I'll leave now. Thanks fo-"

"You aren't going anywhere with that concussion." Billy expected him to stay still. Despite the crazy tension between them, Steve actually listened. "You know Harrington, I didn't mean to get rough with you on court today."

"Yeah? Doesn't seem like it." That put Steve in a foul mood. Billy breathed in sharply. It was clear that he was trying to be calm as possible.

"Look, I'm trying okay?" the blond slams his palm on the steering wheel. "Maybe you should give me the benefit of doubt."

"Why should I?" Steve's head was starting to hurt again the longer he stares at Billy so he looked away. "You hurt me like it's so fun. Like beating up Steve is the most fun thing to do. And for what Billy? So people can think you're cool? Guess what." Steve turns to him, eyes hard. "I don't fucking care about that shit. You do your shit, I do mine, alright? Besides, we've been good before the whole Byers incident. What changed now?"

Silence fell in Billy's camaro. They stared at each other hard, waiting for the other to break.

Steve was right. They were good before the whole incident. A few banters here and there, a few threats but never a real fight. But Billy really hated liars and Steve was one that night at the Byers household. He had drove all around Hawkins looking for Max and where does he find her? In some creepy house in the middle of the woods with none other than Steve Harrington in a group of male kids. Now, Billy shouldn't even be thinking about the implications but that night was rough on him and his mind went a mile a minute. He knows what kind of person he really is. Deep inside him, there was an anger waiting to be released. That night when he met Steve, that wasn't even half of it. Of course he had realize that Steve didn't deserve it but did he care? Not really. Billy loved every moment of it. He liked how Steve crumpled to the floor after he smashed a plate on

his skull. He liked it when his knuckles connected at Steve's face. But most of all, Billy loved seeing the damage he had left in his wake. It made him feel so alive that he couldn't get off his high so easily. Max had to sedate him just so he could "chill the fuck out". But really, what was going on in that house? Why were there drawings on the walls? Were the rumors about Will Byers really true?

Thinking about that night, more questions bubbled in Billy's mind. As a witness to that creepiness, he was at least entitled to some answers but none were given especially with the cold treatment Max was given him and the rest of the people involved. As if he was just in the wrong place and time. As if it never happened. And it made Billy so mad to realize that they were leaving him out on something big. It was like everyone knew except him and he hated being left out. That alone made his blood boil.

"Well fuck Harrington, I thought you were smart. Haven't I told you before? I get what I want and I want answers. What. Were. You. Doing. At. The. Byers. House?"

Steve couldn't answer that. He had to sign a million papers for confidentiality or else he might get taken away like Will or Eleven. Even now, he still finds the girl surreal.

"I can't tell you."

"That's bullshit." Billy hisses.

The word jogs a memory in Steve's head. He remembers that night, another party, with Nancy. They were still a couple then. The king and princess of Hawkins. Billy was also there that night, provoking him into a drinking contest or some sort which Steve wasn't interested in. He was more worried about Nancy that night. Nancy who was out of it. Nancy who was trying to pretend that everything they had was good but wasn't enough. Nancy who called him bullshit.

It left Steve feeling hallow.

Now the heaviness in his chest outweighed the pounding of his head. He brought his hands to his face and sighed. He needed to get out of this car, he couldn't breathe well. Everything was simply closing in

on him. It was as if Stacey was strangling him again. That would have been a better situation than reliving his lost feelings for Nancy.

Steve takes a wobbly step out of Billy's car and slams the door shut as the other yell for him to come back.

Steve was done.

He was done for the night.

He just wanted to rest. Maybe eternally

Notes for the Chapter:

So I plan to make a plot twist soon, something I'm comfortable with and something you guys might like haha.. though the process into getting there doesn't make sense, I can hope that it'll peak your interests.

4. Doubt

Summary for the Chapter:

Everyone gets together for some holiday fun.

Classes ended the week after Stacey's miserable party. Steve had long recovered from his concussion and was currently helping Mrs. Henderson and Dustin set up their Christmas tree in the living room.

The other nerds were there too. Mike and Will were handing out the decorations while Lucas and Max placed the garlands wherever Mrs. Henderson wanted. She had commented that this was the most people she had in their house that she teared at the thought of a happy Christmas with everyone.

Earlier that day, Steve and Billy stared at each other momentarily as the blond drop off Max. There was a tension between the two teens that the kids couldn't put a finger on. Max was the one who noticed it first since Billy hadn't bullied her in a while. She was surprised that in their usual fights, Billy would just sigh in defeat and retreat to his room. Which Neil approved of. At least Billy was being a bigger person, as Neil states. But of course, there were still small outbursts of anger like the time Billy spilled coffee all over his pants. The blond had cussed so hard that Susan had to cover Max's ears. Neil never heard of it, thank God, but it was quite unnerving to see that side of Billy nonetheless.

They were huddled in the living room with hot chocolate when Max brought the topic up.

"You know, Billy's been weird." the red-head starts. It draws everyone's attention especially Lucas who had been assaulted by Billy

before.

“When was he not weird?” Lucas snorts. This makes the rest of them laugh except Steve who seemed like he was trapped in an enclosed space.

“No, I mean, he’s nicer?” Even Max wasn’t sure about what she was saying. It wasn’t natural to associate the word nice with Billy Hargrove.

“Nice doesn’t sound good on Billy. Maybe he hit his head?” Dustin offers. Billy was never a topic he thought that they’d have. It was just taboo for their group after the guy hurt Steve. “Steve, did you hit him with a plate on the head for revenge?”

“Huh? What? No.” Steve frowns at the idea of violence. “You think I’ll win against him?”

This makes all the pre-teens laugh at the confession. They were aware that strength wasn’t Steve’s strong suit but they admire him for trying anyway. Everyone in their little group has laid their life for one another, one way or another. And because of these instances, their bond with each other grew. Steve didn’t know he’d find ease with younger people. Though he wished he had some older friends who can relate to most of his internal crisis.

“Oh Steve.” Dustin wipes non-existent tears from his eyes. “He hasn’t come near you recently, has he?”

“Not really. It’s better that way isn’t it? We steer away from each other’s path and no one gets hurt. I honestly don’t see the problem if Billy’s nicer. But yeah, I’d definitely hit his head with a plate if given the chance.”

They all laugh again. It was a peace Steve never knew existed.

A day later, Jonathan and Nancy invite Steve to eat breakfast at the newly built diner just outside Hawkins. Steve drove there groggily. The cold wasn't doing him any good. He craved heat but his house, despite the heater being on, didn't provide enough. At the sight of hot chocolate that morning, Steve felt a little warmer. Opposite of him sat the two, waiting for their food to be settled in front of them.

“Hey Steve?” Nancy was the first to speak. “How're you spending Christmas this year?”

It was a simple question yet Steve took a while to answer. He hadn't really thought about it after his parents called him a few days ago, telling him that they'd be back by New Year's eve instead of Christmas Eve. Ever since that, Steve didn't really know what else to do for Christmas so he just moved on from the idea. Last year, he spent it at Nancy's house with Mike and for him, it was the best Christmas he had for years. That was when Nancy was still his girlfriend, when Nancy still loved him.

“To be honest? I don't know Nancy.” There was a little strain in his voice as he answers. “I was expecting my parents to come back earlier this year, I mean, they promised but you know, shit happens.” Steve shrugs.

Nancy and Jonathan exchange looks. That's when Nancy smiled which caught Steve off hand. It was like the two were talking telepathically with the way they grinned at each other.

“We were thinking of throwing a party at your house. Joyce and Jim, the kids, you, just a private party for our little circle. We already

have everything planned and everything. We just need your approval to hold it in your house.” Both Jonathan and Nancy looked at him hopefully.

They weren't doing this for themselves, Steve learnt how selfless these two were long ago. It was one of those moments Steve had to take a deep breathe and let himself process the idea that there were people who considered him important despite how alone he felt most of the time. In front of him were two people, proof, that people loved him enough to go out their way to spend a special time in their life with him.

Steve couldn't find the words to answer them. He was feeling overwhelmed so he simply nodded his head and smiled to himself. He loved these people. He wouldn't know what to make of himself today if not for these people who continue to be there for him. Almost makes the incident at Stacey's a foggy memory in the past.

“Yeah sure, why not.” Steve smiled. For once, he felt hopeful for the holiday season.

Jonathan and Nancy's faces light up at the confirmation. Steve was a little nervous about their plan but it felt right to be thought about once in a while. Even if the ones who thought about him were the last two people Steve should be talking to. He just couldn't stay away from the both them. It was as if they have bonded after all the ups and down that happened to them the past year. Sure some romantic bonds were severed but Steve made stronger ones.

That morning, the three of them talked as if they have been long time pals. Laughter came from their booth that people would turn to look at them. They were simply three teens having a good time with each

other's company in a cold December morning. Steve couldn't ask for a better breakfast with two of his most closest friends.

Steve was going to three christmas parties that week. Morning of December 24, he'll be at the Byers household for breakfast to spend a little time with the kids and Jonathan. By lunch, he would be driving to the Holland's residence with Nancy and Jonathan to have lunch with them and to simply remember Barb. And then by late afternoon, he would go home alone to make his house as bright as he could. It was starting to look gloomy due to the non-existent Christmas lights. The only thing that reminded Steve of Christmas ever touching his house was a Christmas tree he and the kids help put up. They've put all the decorations they could find until Dustin thought of putting pictures of them instead. Under the tree, were Steve's gifts for everyone. He took his sweet time in town buying them gifts for the past three days. He wanted to give all of them something special as thanks for being his friend through thick and thin. Sappy, he thought but he was really grateful for them. It had been a rough year for the young Harrington and without them, Steve would have been a goner. He had to admit it at some point, he got awfully depressed with the lack for parent figure and a social life. At that thought, Steve stared at his wrist where three ragged white lines decorated it. He couldn't believe it at first. he had actually done it and no one knew how the pain engulfed in, hidden in a house that felt too big and a fancy life he never asked for.

Steve's day had gone by fine. He laughed most of the time and exchanged talks with most people he had encountered that day. If he was being honest, he felt a little happier as if the Christmas season was finally rubbing on him despite the cold that bites his exposed skin. He had a good time and he couldn't wait for the party that he, Nancy and Jonathan were hosting that night at his house. It was a perfect plan. Just them having a good time and making good memories.

As the three of them loaded the food inside, Steve saw the kids walking down the street to his house. It was a surprise that Max was already with them. Steve expected that Billy was going to drive his sister-in-law but after the events after Stacey's party, Steve told himself it was better this way, it was better to steer away from each other since they never really get along. Billy always left a wreck in his wake and usually it was Steve who got the short end of the stick. But there was something about Billy's presence that Steve would expect. The guy just stood out like a sore thumb with his dumb hair and animalistic mannerisms.

The older teens had set up a small stage in Steve's enormous living room. The couch was moved to the side to make space for the make shift stage. Food was placed on long tables against the wall, complete with pizza, coke and other common Christmas snacks. Jonathan was in the kitchen finishing up a recipe his mom gave him when Dustin stood up on the stage with a brilliant smile.

"Okay so you guys all know what's happening tonight. Each of us has to perform whatever we get from here." the curly-haired boy holds up a fish bowl with folded up paper inside. "Remember, you have to do it or else you have to face the consequence of not doing the challenge. The challenges vary from singing, acting and dancing. Just to have a little Christmas fun."

Everyone cheered including Nancy who was now helping Jonathan in the kitchen.

The first ones to go up on stage was Will and Mike. Mike had pulled out a piece of paper for the both of them and had grinned when they saw what was written on it.

Steve held the VHS recorder Jonathan entrusted him with. He recorded most of the moments he could get his hands on the VHS recorder. Goofing around with these kids had brought a warmth in his chest he never knew existed. They performed as written on the papers, sometimes going little extra to get a laugh out of everyone. There were also games that Steve partook in. There was one game where he and Jonathan got on the table, hands locked together in a vice grip to see who had the better arm muscle once and for all. As if Steve never learned, he lost that game too. Jonathan was still crazy stronger than him. It brought a laugh to them both at how suggestive their hand-holding game was for Nancy after the moment they shared in the infirmary a week before.

Finally, they had dinner. It was a such a normal thing for the season but Steve found this certain Christmas a little special. Last year, he had spent his Christmas at the Wheeler's house. It was awkward for him because Mrs Wheeler wouldn't stop giving him the stink eye but it was the closest he could have during those times. It never occurred to him that he could have thrown a party like this before. But then again, who would he even invite?

“Okay so I got you guys some presents...” Steve starts.

He makes a grab for the presents he placed under the Christmas tree, give them one-by-one. Except for Max.

“You gotta close your eyes first.” he instructs the red-head who raises an eyebrow but a smile gracing her features.

She did as she was told while Steve grabbed her gift from the other room. His heart pounded at the idea of Max's reaction though he was quite excited because this gift was quite special to him. When

everyone else saw what he brought in, they all had shocked reactions, especially Nancy who knew what the gift was for Steve.

"You can open your eyes now." Steve bit his lip in excitement.

Max opened her eyes slowly, gasping as the image before her registered. Steve was holding a guitar case.

"Oh my god, Steve! What- Where- How did you get this?!" she makes a grab for the case and it felt electrifying under her touch. Max had always wanted to play the guitar but didn't have an instrument to do so.

"This is mine but I haven't played in a year..." Steve almost looked apologetic. "And you said you've always wanted a guitar to practice on but your mom couldn't give you one so I thought, hey why not give my guitar to Max? I bet she'll love it."

And Steve couldn't be anymore right. Max was so happy it showed on her face. There were visible tears in her eyes but they didn't fall. Instead, she smiled and hugged the case. Nancy was also into tears as she watched. Steve used to play her songs with it and seeing him pass it down to Max meant that he trusted a part of him to her.

"Why don't you open it? I'm quite proud of it myself. I took good care of it."

Max nodded. She laid the case on the floor as the others crowd around her. There was a collective "Ohh" as she opens the case to reveal a Gibson Les Paul Standard in wine red. She was clearly

awestruck upon seeing it. Steve felt his chest swell at the sight of a happy Max. Ever since they've become friends, Steve had never seen Max really happy. She was always stressed either because of Billy or Neil and seeing a huge smile on her face with tears daring to fall from her eyes, Steve couldn't be any happier that night.

"Wow Steve, you're a real mom now." Dustin comments. This makes a few of them giggle. Steve had become that friend who was either calling them dipshit or making their day.

"Shut it dipshit. You haven't even opened my gift for you." Steve rolls his eyes.

"Well by the weight of it, I'm guessing it's a book." The younger boy picked up his untouched gift once again and stared at it. He wasn't sure if he should open it there or wait until he got home to open everything he got.

"Well duh, doesn't take a genius to figure that one out." Steve snorts. "Open it."

"Will it make me cry like it did with Max?"

"Oh my god, just shut up and open it!"

"Alright alright... Jeez, you're bossier than my mom."

For a moment, the room was silent aside from the crunching of gift wrappers being torn apart. They all opened their gifts at the same time. Judging by their faces, they were all surprised to see Steve's gift for them. Dustin received one of the latest encyclopedia of the year, something he had been telling Steve about for a month. Will got a 48 pack of color pencils he had seen a week before when Steve had drove them to the arcade from his house. He was overjoyed that he gave Steve a tight hug while chanting "thank you" repeatedly. Lucas got a Voltron set and a new and improved sling shot which was something he did not expect. He had always wanted a new sling shot after realizing his old one didn't do much damage. Mike, on the other hand, got a pair of shades that looked identical to Steve's. There was also a Space Invaders Calculator and a denim jacket included that got

Mike's face lighting up in instant. All five tackled Steve into a hug, singing his praises and swearing that he was the best non-female mom they ever had. This makes the older teens laugh at how accurate the description was at the moment.

"Okay guys, get off, I can't get up. It feels like the mashed potatoes Jonathan made is swirling in my stomach."

They helped Steve up. Dustin takes the fish bowl once again and holds it at Steve, earning himself a raised eyebrow from the brunette.

"You're turn, mom." Dustin smiles. "You think you're exempted from the performance? Hell no. The host shall show us his talent in... whatever he gets from the bowl."

"Are you serious? You want me to perform in front of you guys? Do you want your dinner to turn in your stomachs?" Steve couldn't believe what he was hearing. He r

"We are in a democratic party Steve. Of course, you'll perform! Now pick one! We only have an hour left before the party ends." Dustin nudges the bowl at him again.

Steve stares at the fishbowl as if it was offending him. Well, if this was how the night was going to end, he might as well give them a show. He'll make sure to make it extra special for everyone to remember in the coming years. Besides, Steve Harrington was known to be some kind of special. Reaching his hand into the bowl, Steve grabs a piece of people and reads it out loud for everyone to hear.

"Total eclipse... of the heart? What?" He reread the words on the piece of paper just to make sure he was reading the right thing. Wasn't this a song? A love song to be precise? What was the challenge in this?

The younger teens exchanged looks. They all nodded once and Dustin grabs a shoebox from the side of the couch. He gives it to Steve with a mischievous grin on his face. There was something they weren't telling because Steve continues to look at the box in utter confusion. In his hands was a box which looked like it belonged to a woman. By the looks of it, Steve had a feeling that he would not like what was inside of it.

"What am I supposed to do exactly?" Steve was baffled with all the ideas that came into his mind with the song and the pair of shoes given to him. He didn't like where this was going but at the same time, he was quite excited to take up the challenge it held.

"Basically, Steve, you are going to lip sync to the song Total eclipse of the heart while wearing something that will resemble the music video. Look, we even got you this!" Dustin was suddenly shoving a white coat in his arms. "Go on, put it on!"

Steve turned to Nancy and Jonathan for some back up but they were still clueless to what was going to happen. With a sigh, Steve stomps to the other room to see what he can do. His stomach started to twisted at the sight of black stilettos which was surprisingly his size. Just what were these kids doing during their free time? How come they knew his foot size? The coat was a snug fit on him, obviously, it was Mrs. Henderson's. Standing there in the dark, Steve realized how stupid he felt wearing those articles of clothing. He could feel his head pound with a headache. Was he really going to do this?

"What's taking so long?" The kids shout from the living room. Steve was feeling really nervous with this performance of his. This was surely going to be ingrained in their minds for the years to come.

"Just wait!" Steve sighs. Well, fuck it, he thought. These kind of thing rarely happen so might as well play along.

The moment they saw Steve emerge from the room, the music started. With fake confidence instilled in Steve's chest, the brunette goes up the make-shift stage and takes his stand. He wore shades to

hide the shame he was feeling especially now that Jonathan was staring at him, staring at his feet. Nancy couldn't stop giggling that she had to bury her face on Jonathan's sweater. The kids were giggling amongst themselves as Steve walk around as if he was in the music video. He had to mask the embarrassment he was feeling to make the performance work. He wasn't just about to let this chance go by. He could make this something cool or something they can all laugh about in the future. Either way was fine with him. It was rather fun now that the embarrassment was starting to subside.

*(Turn around) Every now and then I get a little bit lonely
And you're never coming 'round*

*(Turn around) Every now and then I get a little bit tired
Of listening to the sound of my tears*

*(Turn around)
Every now and then I get a little bit nervous
That the best of all the years have gone by*

Steve swayed his hips or at least he tried to. The kids howled in laughter as he did so, clearly enjoying the performance he was giving. They were all laughing at this point so Steve went a little more extra. He made huge hand gestures as if he was feeling the song in his heart. It was dumb but he imagine Billy at the corner of his sight, grinning to himself. God if Billy saw him now, Steve wouldn't be able to face anyone anymore.

It was weird though, despite the rough times spent with Billy, Steve couldn't stop thinking about him. Just what the hell was his mind making him think?

And as if things weren't going to get worse, the door bell rang. Steve felt his stomach do a summersault. Just who could come at this time of the night? In the middle of his embarrassing performace to top it all off.

Just as the chorus roll in, Steve unties the coat and dramatically falls into one knee while stripping the coat off his shoulders. At this point, the kids were laughing way to hard that he saw Max wipe a tear from her eye. At least they were having fun but if there was one thing Steve didn't expect that night, it was Billy Hargrove standing at the door way, eyebrows raised and with confusion and surprise in his face. Nancy and Jonathan made their way back to the love seat, exchanging cautious looks at Steve.

Suddenly, Steve felt his face burn. He gets up in his stilettos and faces Billy in dismay.

"Oh god what are you doing in my house?" He couldn't believe Billy just witnessed his ridiculous performance that was only supposed to be for the people invited that night.

"Just thought I'd wait for Max until I pick her up but damn Harrington, I didn't know you were into stuff like this." Billy was obviously amused at the sight in front of him. It beat whatever party he was in earlier.

"Steve! The song's not even done yet! Go on!" Dustin urges despite the additional party member.

All the brunette could do was groan out of frustration. Just because Billy came doesn't mean he had to stop his almost finished performance. With one last sigh, Steve continued with his lip sync. He threw his head side-to-side, singing into his hair brush which served as his make-shift mic. His hair swayed in abandonment, the way that made Billy look. Just who had majestic hair like Steve Harrington?

As the song ended, Steve threw his shades and stilettos somewhere and dramatically fell on the ground, playing dead just for the heck of it. Everyone was certainly entertained. The kids all shrieked and screamed for Steve's performance, completely entranced by him.

Billy had to admit. Steve Harrington deserved the spotlight that night. Despite knowing that the performance was just for fun, he was just captivated by the man standing on the stage. There was that tingling feeling in his fingertips as he continued to watch Steve. Billy simply couldn't take his eyes off the other. It was like he was magnetized by how alluring another man could be for him. Without realizing it, Billy had licked his lips wet, something he did when he felt bothered. It doesn't go unnoticed though because Steve is staring at him with the same intensity.

As Steve step down the stage, the kids crowd him, talking all at once that he didn't know which one he should listen to first. They were just all so excited to talk to him about his epic performance that all this time, they didn't realize the snow picking up outside.

"In case none of you are aware, the roads are undrivable now." Billy clarifies. They all look at him for a second. To prove his point, he points at the window where snow was raining down quite rapidly.

"How did you get here?" Steve asked. The sudden appearance of Billy Hargrove had surprised and caused him to be nervous.

"I was just a few blocks away from a party. Susan had called that she and Neil had left for the night and wouldn't be back until the 28th." The blond looks pointedly at Max. "So that means we're stuck together for four days, Max."

"Wonderful." Max says sarcastically. She hated being stuck with Billy.

The tone in her voice doesn't go unnoticed as Billy zone in on her with wild eyes. Jonathan was ready jump in if not for Steve stepping in between them. Brown eyes stared down blue ones. They held their gazes for a solid minute, allowing tension to rise in the room. Steve

wasn't going to let Billy ruin their night. Besides, it was his house!

"I suggest you relax, Hargrove. You're in my house. Which means you follow my rules."

The heat from earlier had changed into something more intense. It wasn't just a simple warmth crossing Steve's chest, now even his blood boiled at the possibility of Billy making a scene in his house. The night was supposed to be only for friends but now that Billy was there, things had turned sour quite fast.

"There's food if you're hungry." Steve motions at the table behind Billy. The blond follows his gaze and just nods. Billy chances a glance at Max before turning away to the buffet table.

Now that was averted, Steve faced them all. With how the snow was raining down outside, it was impossible to send them all home. Which meant they would have to stay over the night. Steve was making his way up the second floor when he noticed Billy follow him. It was strange but he let the guy follow him, maybe he just needed to ask where the bathroom was. Just as Steve grabbed at doorknob of his door, Billy calls him.

"Harrington." His cool voice reverberating the silent hallway. Steve turns around to face the blond. "Can we talk?"

"What for?" Steve crosses his arms as the cold assault his hands. He needed to turn the furnace up if he's going to have guests that night.

"About that night at the party last week, about the concussion, about everything." There was a strain in Billy's voice that displaced Steve's frustration towards the other.

"What's the point of talking? You're still an asshole." Steve scoffs. He turns around and enters his bedroom. He expected Billy to drop it but he was surprised to be pushed further inside with Billy locking the door behind them.

"I'm not denying what happened in the court but I want to know what you're hiding. I want to know what happened that night at the Byers house." There was a harshness in Billy's tone now. He really wanted to know what happened that night. As if it were easy to tell him. Those scientists would have both their heads if Steve told him.

"And like I said, I can't tell you." Steve was getting real tired of this. Why couldn't Billy just leave him alone?

"And like I said back then, that's bullshit. You CAN tell me but you chose not to. Why is that?"

Steve could feel it in his bones. This wasn't going to end good. Knowing Billy's temper, he might even end up having a bloodied nose and swollen face.

"Why are you so adamant about that night huh? Can't you just leave it to that?" Really, it was getting so frustrating being in the same situation repeatedly.

"I'm at least entitled to that after all the shit Max put me through that day. Not to mention that you fucking lied to my face. You owe me that at least."

There was a hard look on Billy's face as he expected a response from Steve. The other wasn't really in the position to tell Billy but there was a tugging in his chest that told him that it was okay to spill the beans with him. Besides, the crazier it would sound, the less likely Billy would believe him which would still be a win-win situation for the both of them. Though there was still that little voice in Steve's head that prevents him from telling anyway.

"You won't believe me." Was all Steve could muster. It was unbelievable for Steve the first time. What more for Billy who seemed like he wasn't into the supernatural?

"Try me." Challenged Billy.

They stared at one another for a moment, Steve weighing his options and doing a mental pros and cons if ever he did tell Billy what transpired in the Byers house. It wasn't that he was doing it for himself. No, he was doing it for other people like Billy who might get involved and might die in the long run. Thinking about the possibility brought chills to Steve's spine that he suddenly felt his knees go weak. He sat at edge of his bed and sighs deeply. Should he tell Billy? What if he dies and it's on Steve? Can Steve really live with the guilt?

"Still there, Harrington?" Billy snaps his finger in front of Steve who jolts in surprise. The sudden sound rang in Steve's ears. God did it hurt his brain.

"This is going to be a long one. Would you help me out first and bring some clothes and blankets for them down stairs?"

Billy seemed to weigh his options. If helping Steve do his work faster meant he could get his answers sooner, a little lifting wouldn't hurt.

"You have yourself a deal."

Somehow, that tugged a smile in Steve's face. Billy notices it but doesn't comment. Together, they grabbed blankets and clothes for the others down stairs.

Steve could feel his heart going crazy in his chest.

Was it the right decision to trust Billy Hargrove?

Notes for the Chapter:

I was getting so busy and tired from school that I never found the time to write this one out. I was planning to put the plot twist in this chapter but I guess that will have to be in the next one. I'm really

excited in writing that plot twist! Though I also have doubts that you guys would like it. I've consulted with some friends and they say it's okay but I don't know... I will still write it though. This is to hoping I can update faster during the holiday.

the song used here is Doubt by Ransom Collective

5. Maps

Summary for the Chapter:

"I wish it didn't end like this."

Notes for the Chapter:

I was suppose to post this last December 25 but I got to busy with church service and I always came home too tired. Not to mention the parties I attended and friendships I had to fix. I apologize this took look. I'm always in constant mind-block when I'm not writing and I usually find my motivation at 10pm onwards. Here's half of the plot twist!

Snow covered everything Billy's eyes could land upon on. Over the nine hours he has spent in Steve's house, he had learned so many things, with and without Steve's stories. At that moment, it was taking him a long time to wrap his mind around the story Harrington had told him. He hadn't slept good that night thinking about what Steve had told him. It sounded crazy of course, but as it dragged on, the look on Harrington's face wasn't something a joking made would be wearing. He almost seemed terrified, looking at the window and the door occasionally as if something or someone would bust through that door and attack them. Steve had a way with words that made Billy believe, at least for the most part. The part where monsters and a psychic kid caught Billy. A place like Hawkins? He doubted it. As far as his mind could comprehend, there were no such thing.

As he got up from where he was perched last night, the same couch he sat on while listening to Steve's ridiculous story, he heard a crash from outside, specifically downstairs. Daring a glance at Steve's bed, the brunette was still asleep, huddled in his comforter. It was then as he sat up did he feel a blanket fall.

Huh.

Billy stared at it for a while, trying to remember if he grabbed one before sleeping. Steve must have covered him last night while he was

fast asleep because he didn't remember grabbing it. The thought kind of jogged his mind. It was a nice gesture considering the hell he had given the other teen.

Getting up, he fixed his make shift bed and headed down stairs, closing the door gently behind him. He passed by the living room and the guest room, both were empty which meant the bunch were in the kitchen.

As he stepped in the kitchen, he saw mayhem. The kids were preparing, mixing and cracking eggs while Jonathan and Nancy were at the stove, doing a poor job of cooking breakfast. It was a stressful sight that Billy let out a deep sigh and made his way to the kids and looked at them hard. They moved away as he perched himself against the dirtied counter. The blond grabbed and threw stuff at the sink and started preparing what he could see. Jonathan and Nancy exchanged looks but continued to work on their part.

"You dipshits work on the coffee. Harrington seems like a coffee guy considering how much coffee he has on that island." Billy points at the island where a kilo of coffee was sitting. "I'll fix this."

The kids shrugged and left him alone.

Time to make Harrington the best breakfast he would ever have and have him worship Billy some more.

For the next hour, Billy mixed and worked on his counter, bossing everyone around as he sees fit to make the most of their time before Steve came down. Soon enough, the kitchen was engulfed in a mouth-watering aroma that even Billy was feeling the hunger in his stomach. Just as he placed the last plate of pancakes on the table, Steve comes into the kitchen with his comforter wrapped around him like some kid. It raised questionable looks on everyone's faces but Steve didn't care. He sat at one of the chairs and looked at them expectantly with sleepy eyes.

"Are you guys eating or not?" He asks groggily. A yawn escapes his lips as he makes a grab for the cup of coffee Mike hands him. He takes a sip and sighs in contentment.

Everyone settles around the table and starts grabbing for food. There was an awkward silence at first which Steve found unsettling that he looked at everyone to see if there was a problem. When he made eye contact with Lucas, he just glanced at Billy who was taking a sip of his coffee at that moment. Steve just raised an eyebrow, as if challenging any of them to start a conversation. When no one budged, he rolled his eyes. After their talk last night, Steve had in his mind that Billy wasn't as bad as he seemed to be the first few weeks he was around. But it still left him feeling a little hostile.

"So Billy..." Steve realizes his mistake too late. He had called Hargrove by his first name which made everyone on the table turn their heads to him. Shit. "The snow's pretty deep and I don't think you guys can leave any time soon until the snow has melted... how about helping me shovel them?"

Billy looks at him calculatingly, those pair of blues squinting as he tried to weigh his options. There was something about how the other looks at him that always catches Steve off guard. Why did he feel so comfortable around Hargrove so suddenly? Was it because of their talk last night? Was that enough for Steve to forgive Billy for every shitty thing he has done to him and his friends?

Steve was naturally forgiving. He forgave Jonathan for bashing his face. He forgave Nancy for calling him bullshit. He forgave his parents for never being present in his life. He forgave a lot of people due to his nature and the experience he had growing up. He would still pick up the fight if it was worth the trouble, it was always the satisfaction after that he was after. He wasn't like Tommy who didn't know when to quit. Being a bully wasn't exactly his taste, he was just with the wrong crowd. Good thing he realized it soon enough.

"You've been making fair points all night Harrington. Maybe I'll stay to shovel some snow for you. I'm not some ungrateful "bully" who'd just come and go." This makes Steve chuckle. It surprises everyone that the two seemed to be sharing an inside joke because Billy was in it too, the jerk was grinning too.

"You're first time with snow?" Billy nods to his question, shoving pancakes and bacon in his mouth as he glances at Max who looks excited about the snow. She was talking with the nerds as soon as she heard about the snow ever since.

"Can't say I'm thrilled, but we'll see."

The ice was finally broken as the group of teens and pre-teens finally chatted away that morning. Billy and Steve had talked most of the morning since everyone else was still careful around the other. Music was finally playing when the time came to clean up the kitchen. Steve had opted to clean the dishes but Billy stopped him, ordered him to take a hot bath and change to thicker clothes since he was still wrapped comfortably in his comforter. They had a staring contest for a good minute before Nancy pulled Steve back to his room where he was manhandled by Jonathan and Nancy. He was quite stubborn sometimes. Billy found it weird that Steve didn't know when to call it quits.

So they were at Steve's yard, fully prepared to face the cold. Max had a scarf wrapped around her neck, a gift from one for the nerds. Billy got a pair of gloves from Steve, a sudden gift out of nowhere which he was grateful for since his Californian body was not prepared for Hawkin's weather. The snow crunched under their snow boots as they went about their business. At first they were just shoveling snow until Will grabbed a handful of snow, balled it in his small hands and threw it at Mike. Suddenly, everyone had the same idea. They balled snow into their hands and started throwing. Mike aimed at Nancy, which Jonathan shielded her from. From then, it was a full on snow fight. Steve couldn't believe it at first but as soon as he got a face full of ice, he was joining in the fight too.

Billy stared at them in disbelief. How could they stand such cold?!

Screams and giggles filled the still air and at this point, Billy didn't see the point of shovel snow. He watched them run about throwing balls of ice at one another, a small smile tugging the corner of his lips. He had never experienced snow like this back when it was just him, his mom and Neil. They would go on trips to one of his mom's friends where snow was a reality but Billy had no one to play with like these guys were doing at the moment.

The blond watched as Jonathan threw a big ball of snow at Steve. The brunette shivered and pointed a challenging finger at Jonathan who just laughed at him. Steve grabbed a handful of snow, ready to throw it at Jonathan when suddenly, Dustin collides with him and he

falls hard on his ass, sliding across the wet pavement. Everyone stops to stare at Steve groan in pain. He was clearly in pain which fueled his need to get back at Jonathan. He still had his snow ball in his hand, thinking of using as this moment as a distraction to throw the ball. As Steve did so, he did not expect Jonathan to move out of its direction. What happened next had left him gaping. The snow ball had hit Billy straight on the face as the other approached him, maybe to ask if he was okay or something, but not his face had changed into something murderous. Steve could feel the fear creep up the depths of his stomach as he stared longer at the other thing.

"Look man- I didn't- it was for Jonathan--" Steve stumbles on his words, his face showing how distraught he was about the incident.

"Really." Billy deadpans. He grabs a handful of snow from the ground and before he could throw, Steve was dashing out of his sight. "Hey!"

"I told you, I didn't mean it!" The other yells back, still running out of his sight.

"You've just made an enemy of me." Billy half-meant it as a joke but he was suddenly feeling the adrenaline of catching Steve. "Come back here Harrington!"

"Fuck you Hargrove!" Steve holds his middle finger out as he opens the door to the woods to run like mad.

Billy had pelted him with numerous snow balls by the time they were deep into the woods that he didn't notice a log in his way and fell face first into the snow. That was what Steve expected but instead he felt something warm engulfing his arms. The first thing that instincts told was that he was in danger. As hard as he could pull himself back, his arms just wouldn't budge. He was starting to panic more then he remembered: Billy was close behind. So he did the next thing he could think: scream for help.

"Billy! Hey! Are you there?!" He screams, suddenly he was being pulled forward. Whatever was beneath this thick layer of snow, it wanted to take Steve no matter what. "BILLY!!!" He screams again, hoping to whatever god out there for help to find him.

"What the hell are you doing down there Harrington?"

Hearing Billy's voice had never felt so assuring in Steve's entire teenage life. He turned his head, panic on his face as he tried to pull

himself up from whatever was pulling him in on the ground but instead, was tugged forward. He let out a yelp of surprise then started thrashing.

"Pull me up! Something's pulling me down and my arms are stuck!" Steve says through deep breaths.

He was starting to lose hope as another tug pulled him forward. Thankfully, Billy didn't bother asking what was happening. He felt strong arms wrap around his torso and began to pull. It was relieving but Steve's mind told him that his arms were still stuck and it scared the shit out of Steve. He tried to pull himself along with Billy pulling him but instead, he only got pulled in deeper that his shoulders were sinking. Steve yelled at the pain his arms were starting to feel. It was as if they were being pricked by a million burning needles and he couldn't do anything to alleviate himself from the situation. He could feel Billy stress behind him. The other was also breathing quite heavily as he still tried his damn hardest to pull Steve out of whatever was sucking him in. It was both frustrating and terrifying at Steve's end that his eyes started to water. It was that same feeling he woke up to during nights he was visited by multiple nightmares. It was the feeling of hopelessness. He felt so hopeless in his situation that he considered giving up. A million thoughts ran into his mind as to why it'd be okay to let this thing to suck him in. He didn't want this thing to suck Billy in too, not now when they've finally seen eye-to-eye. Steve takes one last look at Billy. He had to do this or else it was them both.

Steve kicks Billy away from him.

It works because Billy stumbles backward, free from his hold on Steve's body.

Steve could see the shock on the other's face before his head was sucked in fast. He was slowly starting to accept the fact that he was going to die. Maybe it was for the better since Steve hadn't feel that meaningful the past month. He had been pondering on what he was going to do now that he and Nancy was no longer. He pondered about college and how he wasn't really ready for it since all he has ever done the past two years were party and get by his schooling. He wasn't like Nancy who had good grades. He wasn't like the kids who

had each other through thick and thin. He was just Steve Harrington, another teen trying to prove his ego to other people. When he looked back to all his years living, he hadn't really made that much difference aside from throwing punches or partying. Steve Harrington wouldn't be missed. He'd just be another fast memory in people's minds, another pretty face lost.

Those were his last thoughts before falling unconscious.

Steve Harrington was nothing.

Billy couldn't believe what Steve had just done.

He stared murderously as Steve's body was swallowed by the ground but that didn't stop him from grabbing into Steve's torso once again, throwing his care away. If he was going to be swallowed with Steve, then so be it. They may have gotten on the wrong foot but last night was different situation. Billy had a glimpse of a different Steve. It wasn't the usual cocky grinning, pretty boy he knew. There was a seriousness in their talk last night despite the jokes Billy threw here and there, Steve remained solid. That moment had told Billy that Steve knew things he shouldn't or that Steve had experienced things beyond he could comprehend. And this right now, this weird moment where the ground is swallowing Steve whole, he didn't want to lose sight of Steve no matter how short they shared a moment.

Billy wasn't sure what was waiting after they'd get swallowed but he was ready to face it as long as he had Steve by his side. The guy could throw a punch. To wherever this thing was going to take them, he hoped it wasn't too bad.

The process was agonizing. He felt himself burning everywhere but it wasn't something he never felt before. The pain left as fast as it came. Which was weird because Billy expected it to stay longer. Instead, he felt cold now, like a chill running down his spine. As he opened his eyes to assess his surroundings, he found himself in the exact same place where the ground had swallowed him and Steve. But it wasn't entirely the same for the air was stale, there was dim light

everywhere he looked and translucent particles flew around in abandonment. Everything looked exactly the same but reversed in color. A few feet away from him laid Steve's unmoving body. Billy immediately got up from his spot and fast walked to Steve, his instincts screaming danger. As he flipped Steve into his back, he realizes the other was out cold. With how menacing everything looked, Billy opted to get them somewhere relatively safe. Maybe if he could take the same way he followed Steve in the woods, he'll get back to Steve's house. At least that was fool-proof plan. He didn't like how the woods seemed to taunt him to go deeper.

Billy took careful steps as he made his way back to Harrington's house, Steve on his back, still unconscious. It was nerve-wracking as he took each step. Anything could attack them any moment and he would be busy trying to protect Harrington. If there was one thing that Billy wouldn't do, it was to give up. He may be in an unfamiliar place but that didn't mean he had to feel hopeless. Billy was always down for a challenge, may it be winning on court or surviving this hell he found himself in. Finally, after a few minutes of trekking, he reaches Steve's house. It still looked the same but there was no snow or was there water in the pool. Instead, there were large vines in it. They seem to pulse along with his heartbeat which creeped the hell out of him. He dared a glance down the empty pool only to find a rotting flesh. Whatever was left from his breakfast, it wanted out.

He got himself and Steve safely in Steve's house. Luckily, the lock still functioned. He placed Steve down in a couch by the living room, walking about the huge house to lock whatever he could find to keep unknown visitors out. Billy also pulled the blinds down as he searched for some make-shift weapon. The only things he found where a nail-ridden bat and a shotgun. It was good enough considering he didn't know what else to do. This was something similar to Steve's story. There were huge pulsating vines, translucent particles flying around and the most horrifying of all, he felt something watching them from above. Thinking about it made Billy nervous. He wasn't prepared for this apocalyptic shit yet he didn't hesitate to go with Steve. Whatever made him hold on exiled king of Hawkins high? Just because of a one night of truthfulness? For Billy, being a misunderstood teenager, he held on to weird things and this was one of those. Steve was weird. Billy liked weird.

Just as he was about to stand up from his chair, Steve stirs from the couch. Billy watches him come around, blinking a few times before his eyes widen in horror. Steve looks around frantically, then at Billy as if he has seen a ghost. Under normal circumstance, it would have been funny but the dread Billy felt overpowered it. His priority was to keep themselves alive.

"Morning princess." Billy snorts.

"Shit." Steve swears, getting up from the couch while grabbing at his hair. "SHIT." He swears again.

"Same sentiments. Mind telling me where we are pretty boy?" He could really use a cigarette right now. Billy was stressing. "This looks like your house but at the same time it's not."

"We're actually- Hey, why're you here?" Now Steve's gaze was fixed on him. Billy still found his eyes a little unsettling.

"Oh, I would have punched you for kicking me on the gut but I wouldn't just let you get eaten by snow. I guess I thought I could pull you out with these guns." To prove his point, Billy flexes his bicep to which Steve rolled his eyes and shook his head. "But whatever pulled you in was too strong that it pulled me in with you."

"Well, I intended to go down here alone. Didn't want to face your wrath or something." Steve jokes, but it came out sounding sad that Billy was starting to be more concerned now that Steve's face shifted to worry. "I still can't believe it... we're actually here." The end sounding more of a whisper.

"What is 'here'?"

"The Upside Down." Steve states a matter-of-factly. At the corner of his eye, he sees his bat and grabs it, sparing a glance at Billy than at it. "Wow."

"Wait wait, so the shit you were telling me about last night was real? Will Byers got lost here?" It was simply unbelievable for Billy. Everything Steve told him last night sounded like a kid's story.

"You think I was kidding? Wait 'til you face one of those demogorgons or demodogs whatever. Things ain't looking pretty for the both of us because the last time I was involved with shit like this, Will was being controlled by this huge ass shit, the Mind Flayer, who has this hive-mind ability that can control other monsters to come attack us. Chief Hopper told us that they didn't exactly killed the Mind Flayer, they simply closed the gate to here, the Upside Down." Steve took a deep breath, closing his eyes as he made a whining

sound deep in his throat. "For all we know, it's seen us and I don't know, maybe it's following us now."

"Fuck me." Steve raises an eyebrow to that. "How do we get out of here?"

"I don't know." Steve answers weakly. Being in their situation makes him weak. He hadn't planned to be back in this situation this soon.

"You don't know?" Billy's voice was harsh. He grabs Steve by the shirt and glares, demanding something he couldn't give.

"I don't know okay?" He pushes Billy off of him, scoffing. "I'm just as clueless as you are and the best option we have is get out there and look for a way out." Steve was stressing, it was apparent at how he pulled at his hair. Billy wanted to stop him because it was starting to annoy the heck out of him but he was also running options through his mind.

They had to go leave the safety of Steve's house for the possibility of going back to their side. Staying longer here would make them easy targets to whatever would be after them. At least out there, they had a bigger chance of running away from it. Billy just hated the dread that had started to creep up his chest. He had an unsettling feeling in his gut that they were going to die the moment they stepped out of the comfort of these four walls.

"Fucking shit!" Billy screams in frustration out. Why was this happening all of a sudden? "Fine! You know where we're going right?" Steve just grimaces. Billy groans some more.

They both stood behind the front door, exchanging looks before Billy unlocks and pushes the door open. They take a deep breath then stepped out. Steve lead the way naturally. He had done it before and he trusts Billy enough to cover his back. Their first step was to check if his car in this side of reality worked. It was weird enough that the door was unlocked but it was even weirder when Steve found his car key stuck at the keyhole. He takes a shaky breath and turns it on, crying in joy when the enjoy comes to life.

"Come on! Let's see if there's something down town we can use, then we check out the Byers house for any portal." Steve hopes the last option would lead them somewhere.

Without another word, Billy gets in the front seat and they drive off.

There was a chill in Steve's bones as they pass by familiar streets. Everything was as is minus the community itself. It was like a horrible plague has left Hawkins in the worst condition to sustain life. All the while, Billy looked out the window, up at the sky where he tried to make out whatever was in the clouds that was giving him the creeps. This must be the Mind Flayer, he thinks. There was a silhouette above them that seemed to be watching them but aside from that, nothing else happened. It was just them and the wind howling as they drove pass.

Steve tapped his fingers against the steering wheel with all the nervous energy he had, willing for it to go away once they reach town because he wasn't sure he can function properly with how nervous his system was. Billy notices this and chuckles. He really wished there was some tunes they could listen to lessen the tension they were feeling. Even he was getting nervous just watching Steve fidget in his seat.

"It'd be real great if we could contact them somehow." Steve suddenly says as they reach the police station. Nothing in the ordinary aside the pulsating vines.

"Tell me about it. God this place is creeping me the fuck out." Billy comments.

They get out of Steve's car, walking up front the station to see if they could get in. Slowly, Billy pushed the doors open. They stepped in carefully, getting ready to hit or shoot anything that may come their way but nothing. Instead, they were only greeted by mess. Deeming it safe, they put their weapons away and walked to where Hopper's office would be. Steve notices it first. The year on the papers were all in 1983. Then he goes to check the time, it was still flowing but faster than he was accustomed to. It was as if the time in the Upside Down was faster despite being behind a year.

He meets Billy outside where he finds the other with a bag filled with guns and ammos. *Good thinking*, Steve thinks. He hadn't thought of getting more weapons since he had told himself long ago that they weren't staying in this god forsaken place long. But then again, Will Byers was lost here for a whole week. How long was it going to be for them before they got sick like Will? Steve vaguely remembers that the air in the Upside Down was contagious.

They get in his car again and drive away. This time, they were going to see if they can get some groceries. Steve was getting hungry from all the nervous energy in his stomach. At the same time, he was feeling really jumpy at the thought of getting in the center of town. Could there be something waiting for them there?

"You know what Harrington," Steve jumps slightly at the mention of his family name. They had been going on with silence that he actually forgot what Billy's voice sounds like. "If we make it out here alive, let's hang out."

That's surprising, Steve didn't expect this at all.

"You make me really nervous Hargrove." Steve chuckles. "But I like that idea. You don't know how hard it is to be a third-wheel with your ex." That makes Billy snort.

"Hey, I told you this once before, there's lots of bitches out there in the sea and I clearly left some for you." Billy winks. Steve rolls his eyes and laughs.

"Yeah, not interested. See, you go for the weird girls in our batch. Nancy? She's one of the few good things in Hawkins." It was nice talking about Nancy. Steve still thinks of her fondly.

"Oh yeah? What is with this Wheeler girl that got you so hung up huh? Mind sharing a little?" Steve shakes his head. This wasn't the time.

"Maybe next time when we get out of here and have one of those hangouts, big guy. I can't think straight just yet."

They were nearing the grocery store which meant their conversation was going to be cut short. Steve turns the engine off and they both step out. This time, he felt different kinds of wrong but they moved on anyway. He clutched at his bat extra tight as they pass the double doors of the store, his mind hyperaware of his surroundings. The lights in the store were a dim blue and it was surprising that there was electricity in this place. They walk down aisle upon aisle, taking snacks they could shove in their pockets before reaching the beverage sections. They had to double check if anything was edible since the Upside Down was a year late. Billy was the daredevil between the two of them. He takes a cold beer from the fridge, opens it and takes a long swig of it. Steve watches in horror as the other chug down the bottle's contents. They weren't even sure if anything in this

side was safe! But after seeing the contents disappear and Billy still standing, it was safe to say anything was edible as long as it was clean.

Then they hear a howl.

Steve's suddenly feeling at edge again. He holds his bat with two hands and gets into position, eyes darting from any possible area of attack.

The lights flicker. Steve feels his stomach flip. *It's here.*

The lights flicker faster now, just as fast as their hearts beat in their chests. Billy and Steve has their backs against each other as they wait for anything.

At the end of the beverage aisle, stood a tall figure.

Shit, Shit, Shit, Shit, Steve's mind chanted.

It wasn't a demodog. It was a full-size demogorgon, one that he, Jonathan and Nancy fought with a year ago. It was slowly making its way towards them, it's flowery mouth opening in a frightening way that has Billy stiff in his spot. Steve couldn't blame him. The thing was twice their body and it was his first time facing it. With a sudden burst of courage in his chest, Steve steps in front of Billy, shielding the other from the demogorgon as it runs to them in all fours.

Steve yells for good measure before swinging his bat at it, smacking it hard on the side of its flower-like face and sending a state of stupor. He hears a crunch but he realizes it too late when he sees his left arm clawed at. Three big ugly bloody lines on his arm woke Billy from his trance. The blond panics but realizes he has to do something about the bigger problem. With shaking hands and an unsure resolve, he points the shotgun at the demogorgon and shots. Steve ducks as the demogorgon recoil back in pain. It hisses and howls and Steve takes this as a cue to grab Billy and run.

"Give me your keys!" Billy yells as they emerge out of the store. Steve tosses it to him and soon enough, they were in his car but now with Billy driving them away from town.

Steve hisses in pain as he grips his arm in hopes of stopping the pain. It was too deep to bandage up yet it was too big to leave it be. He feels tears sting his eyes as the pain gets unbearable. It was the same feeling as being swallowed by the ground. The claw marks were burning and he was sure he was going to die from immense pain. Panting hard, Steve tells Billy to head to the Byers house, that they had a plan to follow.

Even though all Billy wanted to do was stop the car and help Steve with his wounds, he also didn't want to stop driving. If it meant getting to the Byers house to find a portal where they can cross and get better medical help, Billy would take the chance. He'd ignore Steve writhing in pain for a better chance of survival. Steve's tears didn't go unnoticed. Billy saw them alright and he felt bad that he froze earlier. He felt bad that Steve had to take the damage.

With Steve's directions, they get to the Byers household in no time. Billy gets out first then runs to Steve's side, helping and supporting him out so they could both search the vicinity. As they get past the doors, Billy's surprised to see the house in a different arrangement. Instead of those drawings he saw before, there were Christmas lights hung around with the alphabet painted at one wall of the living room. It disturbed him to no end but he had other things to do. Steve whimpering had pulled him out of his thoughts. The blood was now trickling down his arm and Steve looked like he was fading out fast. Billy panicked. He hasn't seen this much blood before. So, he did the most practical thing he could think of: he laid Steve down the nearby couch and pulled out flask he had in the pocket of his leather jacket. Steve looked at him with wide eyes, getting the idea, which resulted to Steve thrashing.

"Trust me Steve, this hurts me more than it'll hurt you." It was an obvious lie. It was going to hurt like a fucking bitch.

Steve screams as the flask's contents were dumped on his wounds. He has Billy's wrist in a vice grip as he cries the pain out, sobbing at the stinging his wounds were feeling. Billy then takes the scarf off his neck and tries his hardest to do first aid bandage on the open wounds. Steve goes boneless then, whimpering at the overwhelming pain his body was feeling.

"Better?" Billy tried for small talk but Steve only glared at him.

"Fuck you so much." Steve seethes.

"You're welcome." All Billy could do was grin at that point. He did feel bad but his priority was keeping themselves alive. "Now let's check out this goddamn house if there are any portals home."

Steve nodded. He lets Billy pick him up from the couch as they venture through the Byers house. Sweat beaded Steve's temple as he tried his hardest to keep a straight mind throughout their search. By the time they were back in the living room, after concluding that there was nothing, Steve was resting his head on Billy's shoulder.

"You alright?" There was concern in Billy's voice that Steve finds off-putting. He had never seen this side of Billy ever.

"I don't think I can keep my eyes open for long..." The pounding in Steve's head was just too much at this point. "I think... we should drive around and look for something like a glowing patch... yeah... I remember seeing the gate look like that. Red and glowing."

"Yeah okay, you can't think clear anymore. Let's go before more of those monsters find us."

Billy leads the way this time. He puts Steve in the front seat before sitting in the driver's seat. For the third time that day, they were driving away from the unknown. At that point, he wasn't as scared as he was the first few minutes in the Upside Down. Now, he was just worried for the both of them, most especially Steve. The guy looked like hell. He was sweating and his eyes suddenly looked way too dark around the edges, like those people on TV when they were dying. Steve looked like he was dying.

His train of thought came to a halt when he heard howling again. Shit. It was the same howl they heard in the grocery store a while back. Billy felt Steve tense from his seat. Suddenly, he was sitting up straighter, gripping at his bat despite the state he was in, Steve was ready to fight.

"I'm really getting tired of this whole prey-chase thing. What the hell do they want from us?" Billy was getting really angry at their situation.

Though he really couldn't blame anyone at the matter. He was the

one who decided to grab on Steve and let himself be swallowed too. He let it happen for reasons he has yet to think through after this make it through this. If they ever make it out alive.

From his left peripheral vision, Billy saw movement. It came at them too fast to see it. All he knew was that it hit the car and they skidded off the main road into the woods again. Billy was unfamiliar of the area. Ever since they moved to Hawkins, he had never drove to places like the one he was driving on at the moment. All he had was gut feeling that this road might help them.

“We... we're going to the quarry?” Steve mumbles. Obviously, he had been there too many times to recognize it.

“Guess we are, princess.”

“But it's a dead- WHOA!”

The car lurched forward as something hit them from the back. Billy could only guess it was one of those demogorgons again. He stepped on the accelerator harder, zooming faster than Steve was used to. Looking at the rear-view mirror, Billy notices a herd of dog like creatures running after them. Adrenaline rushes through his veins as Billy takes this as a challenge to outrun them.

From a far, there was something that glowed red. Billy remembers something about red and glowing about being a portal from what Steve had babbled earlier and if he was telling the truth, they were on the right road to freedom. At the same time, he dreaded that he could be wrong. With how the lightning shone on a silhouette above the clouds, Billy was feeling unsure again. He catches a glance at Steve whose skin had paled over the minutes they've been driving. He needed to find this guy a doctor soon.

Billy was too tense to realize that he had drove through an open gate that had a hazard sign. He only realized too late that he was driving too fast when they neared the cliff.

“Shit! Billy!”

Steve screams as he hits the breaks but it was futile. The car was free falling to a mass of red glowing water. It looked like it would burn but that wasn't Billy's first thought. He thought he was going to

die then and there with Steve Harrington next to him. He didn't want his life to end like this. He didn't want the regret that came with it. He still owe Steve quality hangout time. He still wanted to get into college and all the adult stuff he had planned. Jumping into a red glowing mass of water was not in his plans but what else could he do when they were already in the process of drowning themselves to death?

With one last glance to Steve, Billy grabbed Steve's hand as they submerge the water, losing their breathes all too quickly for not being able to prepare themselves for the worst.

He wished it didn't had to end like this.

Notes for the Chapter:

Who do you think is the rotting flesh in Steve's pool is? ;)

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Also I apologize if there are stuff that's been written horribly. I haven't written with a clear mind for so long. This fanfic is no exception. I tried to beta read as best as I can... :) corrections are welcome! English isn't exactly my first language.

6. Mad world

Notes for the Chapter:

Here's half of the plot twist! Apologies for taking long :) I couldn't find the time to open my laptop and write when my blood keeps going low to the point that my migraines always knock me out.

PS: I have no beta-readers, I write purely on imagination and gut feeling so there might be grammatical errors I may not be aware of (I usually write from 1am - 3am). I am also no native of America.

Italicized text are flashbacks or thought bubbles (in this chapter, it's flashbacks)

The waves crashed gently against the shoreline as the sun set beautifully at the horizon. There was a chill in the breeze that was often present during the summer nights but Billy found it welcoming. It was the only time of the year where he appreciated a little bite of the chill. California was his home. Sun-kissed skin and music was his life. He had told himself that this is where he was going to live, this is where he had lived all his life, and this is where he was going to spend his last moments. Besides, this was where his mother promised she'll stay.

The sea was always something that has been constant in Billy's life. He couldn't imagine a life without it. Most of his memories were made at the beach and most of them had his mom in them. He remembered a time when everything was alright. A time when he didn't fear anything.

He had his mother to thank for his wonderful childhood. She had always been the light of his life even if his father was always out of the picture. Billy could say that his father felt the same since he smiled more then. Neil wasn't as rough. He was gentle and cared very much for his wife.

Whenever people talked about their family, all Billy could hear were praises. His mother was a known singer throughout San Clemente. She would often bring Billy to her gigs which brought the fun and color and his life. There was not a dull moment in his life when he was with his mother. Billy loved his mother more than anything else, more than himself. He'd do anything for her. He'd do anything just for one more day with her.

Billy wakes up all too suddenly. He groans as white light attack his eyes. Why was it so bright?

"Hey hey... you should take it easy." Says a voice from his right. It was female and he was sure he heard it before.

"wh... where...?" He realizes he has no voice as his question turns in a whisper instead.

"You're in the hospital, Hawkins General Hospital."

After a few seconds of adjusting to the light, Billy's vision finally cleared. He was indeed in a hospital with all the bright lights and disinfectant in the air. One of the places he hated in earth. He sighs as he turns to look at his visitor. It surprises him to see a familiar face sitting in the same room as him. Not to mention that this familiar face didn't like his existence.

"Nancy?"

Max stared at the woods behind Steve's house for the nth time that afternoon. Both his brother and Steve had yet to return after running off into the woods during their snowball fight that morning and it worried her not being able to see Billy. Even though their relationship was strained, she still considered Billy as family even if the other didn't think the same. Billy had played a major role in her life despite their recent downfall in the Byers house a few weeks ago.

It had been five hours since Billy and Steve had left yet no one has done anything aside to go into the woods and come back with nothing. Dustin suggested they call Chief Hopper but everyone else disagreed since they knew how busy the chief was right now with all the talking and demanding he had been doing with the scientists. That is why they were surprised to find his car pulling up in front of Steve's drive way. The first one to step out was Eleven, who Mike greeted with a hug. The look on Chief Hopper's face looked grim and none of them would like to know why.

“Where's Steve?” He asks first.

Everyone exchanged looks before Dustin spoke up for the majority.

“He's missing. We couldn't find him no matter how far we've searched through the woods behind his house. It was like he and Billy just disappeared into thin air.”

This unsettles everyone with how Dustin makes it final. Steve and Billy are missing, they were just denying it because they were just with them not too long ago. Declaring they're missing is a horrible truth they all denied for the past hours. Jim watches them exchange worried looks. It was too soon for another major problem.

"I was talking with Owens at the diner when a colleague of his called. Said that they've picked up a high frequency around this neighborhood and I remembered the whole lot of you were having a party here last night. I got word from your parents that all of you here were stuck because of the freak snow last night and it just didn't sit well with me. Turns out El felt a disturbance too."

"They're in the Upside Down." El says with finality. She was just as worried as them but she looked like she had a plan. "Need to talk to them."

"The problem now is... after the high frequency this morning, whatever happened, went dormant and El can't trace them."

This puts everyone on edge especially Max and Dustin who're the closest to the missing teens. Dustin took a step back and falls on the couch to sit, taking his cap off to clear his curls out of his face as the reality of Steve missing sinks in. He couldn't accept it at all. Steve had stood up like an older brother to him. They haven't even spent a month together and he's already gone? It was just upsetting.

"So that's it? They're gone?" Lucas asks as he take in Max and Dustin's upset faces.

"I can't say but we'll try to reach them again... just a moment ago, another high frequency disturbed the lab's radar. It was higher than the first one that it burned one of their computers. We're hoping that they've somehow managed to come back to this side of the plane but..." Jim chances a glance at El and sighs. "We checked the quarry where the frequency was, yet there was no sign of Billy and Steve. We thought that they might have went back here."

"That doesn't make any sense!" Max yells. Annoying as Billy was, she didn't like the idea of not seeing the blond. What would Neil say? Heck, what would he do? Max still cared for her idiot in-law. She

hoped they'd come to better terms someday.

"It really doesn't kid. Look, we're doing the best we can but your parents had called me and told me to tell you guys to go home. They're getting worried that this might end up like Will's case."

That being said left everyone speechless once again. They all felt bad for Will to go through all those hardships yet they still have him, laughing, smiling and living with them.

Out of the bunch, Dustin hoped for the best. He wanted Steve back safe and sound. During the short time they have spent together, Dustin had grown to love Steve's company. He was the older brother he wished he had. Steve was an extension of his small family since there has been a lacking of male figures in Dustin's life. Realizing that Steve was really lost has left him boneless. Everything around him didn't matter as a million thoughts came rushing into his mind, searching for a solution. Dustin was terrified of the possibility that Steve might have gotten hurt but he had faith in the teen. Steve had protected them from the demodogs, he had protected Dustin, forgoing his own safety to stick to his promise to keep them safe, to keep Dustin safe. It was the most selfless thing someone could do for Dustin. At that moment, he would do the same for Steve.

"You really have no plan after your graduate from high school, Steve?"

"Don't you have a dream you'd want to pursue?"

"You're such a wimp, someone has beat that face of yours again. Don't you get tired being pushed down?"

"Man up Steve. You carry our name and I will not tolerate weakness in this family."

Almond eyes stare at white ceilings. Steve had been awake for an hour now yet he couldn't even start to panic that his arm was killing him or the fact that he was in a hospital bed judging from the smell of disinfectant and the soreness his body felt. His mind overpowered the pain his body was yelling at him, reliving the times his father had called him names and made him feel worthless. There was a void in his chest that was starting to eat him alive again. This was not the day he should be feeling it but he couldn't help it at all. He couldn't even identify the feeling which frustrated him to no end. It wasn't normal, he realized. Most people didn't get this sad for a long time. They didn't get sad when they wake up or when they went to sleep but Steve always gets sad. He gets sad even without a reason. He'd spend an hour or two just staring at one space, his mind running rampant with unnecessary thoughts that his chest began to hurt, completely ignoring the burning sting on his left bicep where the demogorgon had clawed him.

Thinking about it, how did they get out of the Upside Down? The last thing Steve remembered was driving away from an army of demodogs and drowning. After that, he just blacked out. Now he was in a hospital bed that he wasn't familiar with. He had been to the hospital often but this room didn't resemble the usual hospitals in Hawkins. Where was he?

As if the universe was listening, the door to his room swings open. A stiff looking man enters his room, his bangs covering his eyes. But as the said man move his bangs away from his face, Steve realizes he knows this person.

"Jonathan?" Steve's voice cracks at the end. He hadn't realize his

throat was rough.

"Um... No, I'm Charlie." Jonathan look-alike extends a hand which Steve takes to shake. "I'm one of the volunteer in this hospital and I saw you wake up through the camera yet you didn't call for a nurse so I came instead."

Steve looked at him funny. Camera? What did he mean by camera? Steve couldn't see any camera in the room aside from a small red dot in one corner of the room. And what was with all the buttons on his bed? It confused Steve to no end.

"Alright, Charlie... where am I?"

"Hawkins General Hospital. May I know your name?"

That couldn't be right. Hawkins General Hospital? The hospital Steve knew wasn't this fancy nor was it air-conditioned. Something's not right. In front of him, Jonathan denies that he's name is Jonathan. Instead, he calls himself Charlie. He was definitely Jonathan but why Charlie? And why doesn't Jonathan know him?

"Dude, you know who I am." That unsettling feelings was back in Steve's stomach. Something was definitely not right. "Steve Harrington. My name's Steve. You beat me up last year remember?"

The statement baffles Jonathan look-alike that he physically cringed upon hearing it.

"I don't- I haven't even met you ever. Why would I beat you up,

Steve? You must be confusing me with someone else." Charlie says rather tiredly. "Your mullet-head friend said the same thing to my girlfriend too. He called her Nancy and he insisted that she was Nancy despite her name being Natalia."

Steve looks at him crazy. What the hell was Jonathan look-alike talking about? And what about this friend of his? Was he talking about Billy?

"Okay... where's Bill-"

Suddenly, the door to Steve's room opens once again. This time, it hit the wall due to the force used to open it. At the door way stood none other than Billy Hargrove himself in a hospital gown. He looked like shit but that wasn't what caught Steve's attention. The intensity in Billy's eyes had him paralyzed in his seat. Why was this guy always so intense?

"Harrington," Billy starts, glancing at Jonathan look-alike for a second before deciding to sit on the spare chair next to Steve's bed. "We need to talk."

"I guess that's my cue. I'll see you guys in an hour. You aren't really allowed to be here Mr. Hargrove but it seems like an important matter that I can overlook this for now. See you guys in a bit."

With that, "Charlie" leaves them alone, closing the door gently behind him.

Billy waited a minute before speaking again. His eyes trailed the

expanse of Steve's left arm which was bandaged neatly. He could only look long enough before feeling the guilt creep up.

"What was that guy's name?" He asks foremost. This confuses Steve but he answers anyway.

"He calls himself Charlie."

"Nancy calls herself Natalia." They were speechless for a while as if their minds synched with the same idea.

Then something struck Steve's mind. He remembers Will telling him about how time is different in the Upside Down. What felt like a month for Will was actually just a week in real time. Not to mention the year the Upside Down was set when they got in. It was a year earlier than Steve's real time year.

"What year is it?" Steve asks.

Billy looks at him funny but realizes that nothing was ever normal around Steve anymore, especially now that he's been in the Upside Down. The blond looks around for a calendar and luckily, there was a small one by the bed side table. He picks it up for closer inspection and was surprised to see the numbers written on it.

"2017..." Billy's eyebrows meet with confusion. 2017? They were 33 years ahead of their own year?

"Holy shit. I didn't thought-" Steve suddenly hisses as he accidentally moves his left arm to grab at his hair. "Fuck that hurts..." Steve mutters under his breathe. He took deep breaths to will the pain away but now that his brain had took notice, the pain was just

unbearable that he started to swear, hitting random buttons on the side of his bed.

"Hey you shouldn't move your arm." Billy sounded worried. Maybe because they were in a different year, with the same people but different reality, that they realized that they only had one another to relate to.

Jonathan look-alike comes back with a tray of medical supplies, behind him was Chief Hopper but he didn't wear the usual attire Billy and Steve were accustomed to. "Charlie" stands at the other side, telling Steve to relax as he was going to inject anesthesia to numb the pain. All Billy could do was watch as Steve groaned in pain, tears bubbling in his eyes again with the tremendous pain he was feeling. He caused that. The guilt ate him up instantly.

"Billy Hargrove I presume? I'm David." Jim look-alike extends a hand. Billy just looks at it until his manners come back and he takes it to shake. "Can I ask you some questions? I would ask you both but your friend looks like he still needs more time to recover before I can question him so it'll just be you and me for now. I also got you new clothes since the doctors ripped your old ones apart to look for wounds."

David holds out a paper bag and all Billy could do was stare as Steve's groaning continued to echo in the room. It takes him a moment before grabbing the paper bag and following David out. Billy was lead back to his own room where Natalia was fixing his bed. They share a brief glance before he goes in the comfort room to get dressed.

The first thing Billy does was stare himself at the mirror. He stared at the reflection looking back at him with such intense gaze. There were

bags under his eyes and his skin was gaunt. He didn't like the look he had on. It was as if years had been taken off his lifespan. With aching joints, he strips down his hospital gown and takes out the clothes David had given him. He expected them to be scratchy and uncomfortable like the clothes he wore before but they turned out to be really comfortable and nice against his skin he could probably sleep on them. Looking at the mirror once again, Billy looked much better. He fixed his hair as best as he could before stepping out the cramped space.

David and Natalia turned as they heard the door of the comfort room open. David claps his hand on Billy's back as they walk out the room with Natalia close behind. They go back to Steve's room where the brunette was sleeping soundly again. Charlie looked like a mess with his hair spiking everywhere. It was as if Steve had given him a hard time. Billy grinned at the thought. The guy still knew how to give people hell even in a different time.

The four of them sat down on the chairs and couches provided in the room, coffee and snacks on the table. It was then that Billy realized he was famished. He takes a cup of coffee and drinks, moaning in satisfaction as the aroma reached his nostrils and the slight bitter taste touching his tongue.

"Okay, I'm going to introduce myself again. I'm David Hopper, Chief of the town. These two are Charlie Byers and Natalia Wheeler, volunteers here in the hospital." David puts a wallet on the table and Billy instantly recognizes it. "I searched for identifications and so far, I'm confused. Your name is Billy Hargrove, correct?"

Billy nods. He reaches and grabs his wallet to check if anything else was missing.

"Your license says you're from California but the year... 1983? This isn't some kind of prank is it? Your friend, Steve Harrington, he's from Hawkins but, there were no records of a Steve Harrington ever since. Care to explain who you are and where you both are from?"

David looks at him calculatingly. It was the same look Jim would give them whenever there was something he wanted clarified. How was Billy going to explain about the Upside Down when Steve just told him about it two nights ago? Not in great detail to boot. He can't even explain what happened. They were supposed to come back to their own side, on the right time but, instead got sent into the future. Thinking about the reasons Billy could tell them frustrated him. He really wished Steve was awake.

"Fuck well I'm just as clueless as you but I have some idea though I don't think you people would believe even if I tried." Billy huffs.

"Try us." Natalia challenges, crossing her arms over her chest as she laid her back against the chair rest, gaze fixed on Billy.

"You really want that Wheeler?" Billy cocks an eyebrow.

"You talk like you know us. You called me Nancy. Who does that? We're trying to understand you because we want to help. Whatever happened to you two, ending up in the quarry, it's never happened. For all we know, you both are criminals on the run, pretending to be people from the past, wearing that stupid outdated mullet. Do you even realize how weird your sudden appearance in Hawkins sound?"

Billy hated the fact that he hadn't thought of those possibilities. It makes his blood boil that Natalia made a point, like Nancy usually does. The resemblance was uncanny. How did Steve ever put up with this woman?

Holding his hands up in a surrender, Billy grunts. Might as well tell them what he knows.

"Fine. Since you put it that way, I'm under the impression that whatever I'm going to tell you three, I won't be considered crazy because I'm just as confused as Chief here."

Billy knew that the whole story was going to sound crazy. Would they even believe him that he and Steve were actually from 1984? Or that there's another dimension they call the Upside Down where time flows differently and where monsters, dubbed as demogorgons, actually exists? To Billy, even it sounds surreal. He'd only heard it two nights ago from Steve and he was still processing it in his mind despite going through it.

Natalia and Charlie's faces were priceless as Billy told the story about the monsters. Their faces told him that they couldn't believe what they were hearing. All the while, Chief Hopper listened attentively, as if what Billy was saying was the gospel truth.

It didn't take long for Billy to wrap it up.

Silence settled in the room as Chief Hopper got up from his seat, walked to the window and closed the blinds. He turns his gaze back at Billy and then at Steve then sighs.

"Owens wasn't kidding then."

The name rang a bell in Billy's mind. Steve had mentioned that name before but he forgot who Owens actually was. For some reason, it gave Billy hope that they could go back to their own time since they had a common ground now. Chief Hopper actually has something.

"How do you know that name?" Billy asks. Even if he had no idea who Owens was, just the name had sparked hope in him.

"He's a scientist at Hawkins' Laboratories... He called me early this morning that some 'strange' activity was happening. The electric frequency spiked high this morning. Everything in Hawkins fluctuated and then suddenly, I get a report that two boys were seen floating around the quarry, a restricted area, not too long after the electric frequency spiked. We're in 2017, anything can happen."

Natalia and Charlie exchanged looks. They sensed that they weren't supposed to be there with information that sensitive was being discussed. Unlike Billy though, they understood the story and have processed it faster. It was as if events like these were common in 2017.

"Though it baffles me that there's another dimension called the 'Upside Down' that's the complete replica of Hawkins yet at the same time, it's not." David scratches his beard at the thought.

"It's like the movie Silent Hill or something similar." Charlie says. Natalia nods in agreement. It makes the Chief grin in which Billy doesn't understand.

"Silent Hill?" He looks at the teens opposite of him, who were now grinning like the teens they are.

"It's a horror movie released a few years back. Basically, it's like what you just said. There's the real world and the other world, the replica

of a place. It has monsters and toxic stuff." Charlie puts it simply. So it Silent Hill was a reference.

"Oh." Was all Billy could say.

His interest in them quickly vanished as he spared a glance on Steve. He was sleeping soundly yet Billy couldn't stop staring at the bandages wrapped around his left bicep. How much would have it hurt if it was him who got injured in the short while they were stuck in the Upside Down? He bet he could hold up better than Steve. He was tougher in any other aspect anyway. But it didn't stop him from wondering how Steve felt about all of this. He felt overwhelmed that's for sure. All Billy wanted to do was scream and punching something just to release the frustration that have accumulated the whole time he had woken up from the nightmare experience from the Upside Down.

"This Eleven you speak of, the one with the psychic powers. Can you tell more about her?"

The Chief's question pulled Billy away from his thoughts of home. They locked eyes for a moment, search each other for anything to mistrust. Personally, Billy doesn't trust any of them. Even back in his original time, he didn't trust the bunch especially these three. But when you're in a situation that none is in your favor, you learn to give.

"I haven't the slightest idea about her since Jim would hide her. It's better to ask Steve since he met her. I've only got into this shit just two nights ago so I can't help much."

It was true though. There was no use pressing him for answers when

he was looking for some himself.

“Alright. I believe you.” David sighs. He glances at his watch then the couple. “I’ll bring you both to Owens when Steve is in better condition. Since you’re no one here, you have no money, no family, all of that, use this.” The older of the lot produces a black card from his breast pocket and hands it to Billy. The blond looks at it curiously, feeling a slight excitement as to what the card holds.

“What is this?”

“It’s a key.” David says plainly.

“How the fuck is this a key?” Charlie and Natalia laugh at his innocence.

It hits a nerve in Billy since keys weren’t cards in his time. He shoots them a glare before shoving the damn thing in the pocket of his cardigan. As much as he wants to go out and see where this key is used for, he felt the need to see it with Steve. He won’t admit it out loud but at the back of his mind, aside from feeling bad for Steve, Billy also felt frightened to go out without him. His gut twisting in ways that told him that the moment he walks out that hospital walls, he’ll be more overwhelmed than he already is. Just watching Charlie and Natalia use devices that weren’t from his time already hurt his head.

“Do I have to leave now?”

Billy watched as Steve’s chest rise and fall from breathing. The brunette seemed delicate at that moment, that if anything bad were to happen, Billy’s first instinct would be to protect Steve. It was an awkward thought considering that they had only been talking a few nights ago yet Billy felt easiness around Steve. He was still unsure

about their relationship as friends but so far, he had been able to trust Steve with his life especially when Steve had put himself in danger for the sake of giving Billy time to come to his senses. It was by far the most someone could do for him: to lay their life for someone like Billy. That was his reason for wanting to stay by Steve's side until he recovers enough to venture out the world with him. He wanted Steve to be next to him as they try to figure out the world they were currently stuck in.

"You could stay but I don't think Mr. Harrington will be waking up anytime soon. I've given him enough medicine for the day. He won't be waking up until tomorrow morning." Charlie supplied. Billy's gaze on Steve doesn't go unnoticed by the bunch. It makes Natalia grin at the thought that Billy was being too protective of his friend.

"You do have a point..." Billy sighs in disappointment. "But I really can't leave Steve here alone. I can sleep on the couch."

Natalia couldn't help the grin that crept up her lips. There was something about the way Billy acted around Steve that piqued her interest. The teen was calmer than the time he woke up to seeing her. His eyes glared into hers as if she had done something grave in the past to earn such a look. It baffled Natalia that someone could look that angry but at the same time, look so soft now. Looking at them now, an idea pops into her mind.

"We'll just leave you some pillows and blankets if you want to stay with Steve. Even though visiting hours will end in a while... I think Chief Hopper can do something about Billy staying the night, right Chief?" Natalia looked at David expectantly, who raises his hands in surrender as he walked out the room to talk to the management, probably.

“Please don’t hesitate to call us when something happens to you or Steve. We’ll come back as fast as we can.” Says Charlie.

They shake hands one last time and separated ways.

Billy sat at the armchair David was just sitting on not too long ago and just stared at Steve’s sleeping figure. The brunette still looked pale but it wasn’t as bad as it was in the Upside Down. Billy almost thought Steve wouldn’t be able to make it but here they were, getting the medical attention they needed. He just wished Steve recovered faster so they can think of a plan together.

Max couldn’t decide what’s worse: Billy getting mad at her or Neil getting mad at Billy. Apparently, Neil didn’t like the idea of his son missing since he had told his son to pick up Max last night. What made it worse was that Billy had failed to inform his own father that they were going to stay at some Steve Harrington’s house. Max would have understand Neil’s rage if he showed a little sympathy for Billy but he didn’t. Neil was just looking for more reasons to be mad at his own flesh and blood and Max hated it. Billy may be a jerk but she can understand why he acted out like that. Neil had been the problem and Max always wondered what her mom saw in that asshole.

As she watched Jim’s figure retreat to his car, Max couldn’t help the feeling of dread that crept in her chest. The only good thing she can see about Billy’s disappearance is that there would be nothing to piss Neil off but the blond had become a constant in her life. She couldn’t imagine a day without Billy’s attitude.

That afternoon, Susan drops her off the Wheeler's residence as Neil forcibly tells her they were going to cool their heads off somewhere. Max didn't want to know what that meant. As she knocked on the front door, Karen Wheeler greets her with a smile and she goes inside. In the basement, everyone had huddled around the table, probably brainstorming of possible ways to rescue Steve and Billy.

"Guys, this isn't like Will's case at all!" Lucas slams his palm on the table, getting Dustin, Mike, and Will's attention. Max sat herself at the spare seat and waited for a moment to butt in. "Didn't El already told us that she closed the gates? So, if that's the case, how can the Chief even get in the Upside Down and retrieve them? Like he and Mrs. Byers did a year ago! We aren't even sure if they're really there."

"The Chief already told us that they were! Weren't you listening to him yesterday? There was some high frequency shit going on when they went missing! But what confuses me is the second high frequency he told us. Shouldn't Steve and Billy be back then?" Mike looked exhausted. It was as if they'd been arguing for hours.

"Mike's right." Dustin and Max say in unison.

"Steve and Billy should have been back if high frequency stuff was the sign that they got out, since its how we know they got in the first place, but where are they? What did that second frequency mean?" Max's input had silenced them all.

They all lay back on their chairs and continued to think. It was never okay to lose a party member especially Steve. The kids had already thought of him as an older figure in the group. He's sassy but he protected them, nonetheless laying his life for them. They just couldn't believe Steve was gone. It hadn't even been a full month since they all came together!

"I miss Steve." Dustin says quietly. He had grown closer to Steve after the closing of the gate.

"We miss him too man." Mike comforts. They gave each other an understanding look before Mike decides to grab their D&D board. "We can't do much at the moment. Who wants to play?"

Children's laughter could be heard all around. The sun touched gently on Steve's skin as he sat on one of the swing set. At the corner of his eye, kids were rushing out of school to be greeted by their parents to take them home. How Steve wished he had someone to take him home. Instead, he had learnt to walk back all on his own, which meant he had all the time in the world to do as he pleased.

So he sat the swing and just pushed himself back and forth with not much force. He continued to watch other children being picked up by their parents. They all looked so happy while Steve didn't have a clue of how that felt. Were smiles natural? Steve never had a genuine smile before. He knew how to act around people especially the older ones. Being with kids around his age was either. Most of them were pretty dumb to understand him anyway so he kept his distance from them.

It was awfully lonely though.

He wished there was more than that.

Suddenly the skies went dark. From the blue hue it was a while ago, purple then red ravaged it as if something had cut through the sky and blood spilled out from it. Steve's first instinct was to run but he was too terrified to move from his seat by the swing. He watched in horror as the sky turned red, the clouds turned black and everything seemed to turn for

the worst. There was no one in sight now and all Steve's mind could register was howling. There was howling all around that it gave Steve Goosebumps. Finally, he found his legs working again. He runs away from the playground and heads to the only place he felt safe: his house. Panic rose as he got closer to their street and Steve swore his heart was going to beat out of his chest out of fear. As he takes a step in their house, an invisible force knocks him back, sending him a few feet away from their front door. At this point, Steve is too scared to move from his spot on the ground. With the world shifting into a sinister state and a full grown Demogorgon stalking its way to him slowly, Steve had started to lose hope and had accepted the fact that he was going to die.

BANG!

“...eve... Steve! Wake up Steve!”

Steve jolts awake. His eyes dart around the dim room he forgot he was confined in.

Sweat beaded his temple as he realized that he was in a hospital room and that it was dark out thus the dimness in his room. He was surprised to see Billy standing at the same spot Jona- Charlie was standing in before he lost consciousness. Relief washed over him as Billy's face didn't leave. He was awake, this wasn't a dream, and he was alive. But why were his eyes wet?

He had been crying.

“Are you alright?” Steve's mind failed to process Billy's question and, instead stared at the other dumbly with tears still running down his face. “You're crying.” Billy states.

"I... Just a nightmare." Steve answers exhaustedly. He takes a tissue from the bed side table and wipes at his eyes. Billy holds a glass full of water out for him and he takes it, thankful that there was someone in the room with him. "Sorry you had to see that."

"It's cool."

"What time is it?"

"A little past 4 in the morning. I was asleep and you were sleep talking kind of loudly. It woke me up. I've been trying to wake you ever since but you just... cried." There was guilt in Billy's face as he said this. Steve had a feeling it was something related to his injury.

"Sorry." Was all Steve could say.

"Don't be man. You're the one in pain."

It hits a nerve in Steve that he keeps his mouth closed at the time being.

So far, whatever Charlie had injected him, it was working since Steve didn't feel any pain yet he was quite sore from lying in bed for a while now. It was then he notices that Billy had changed his clothes from the usual denim jacket get up, the blond was wearing a light gray cardigan that complimented his tan skin quite nicely. Not to mention the body hugging shirt and pants, Steve couldn't help but stare. Again. He looked good. Billy sees this and he smirks at him.

"Like what you see, Harrington?"

Steve opens his mouth to retaliate but he had nothing to say. He felt his cheeks burn as he accepted the fact that Billy Hargrove was indeed attractive in his clothes. Well, Billy had been attractive since

day one but Steve would never admit that out loud. Just what would the people think if they heard him call Billy attractive? That would imply something else and Steve didn't like being associated to that "word". It was already hard enough to be called pretty boy/princess by Billy and he was not going to let other people think further than that. He still had his pride.

"Shut up, Hargrove. My eyes just stared on their own out of exhaustion." It was a poor excuse but it was better than admitting that Billy looked good.

"Riiiiiiiiiiiiight." Billy chuckled.

For the next hours that came, Billy and Steve talked. It wasn't a place Billy could call a hang out place but it was good enough if he could talk to Steve in private. Besides, there was some kind of intimacy talking in a dim hospital room, the world silent around them. It was as if the world remained silent to give them the moment they deserved, to get to know each other better.

Billy felt safe. Funny how he could say that Steve almost felt like home.

Notes for the Chapter:

Funny thing is that my chapter titles are song titles. I've watched the recent Riverdale episode where Archie and Veronica were singing "Mad work" by Donnie Darko and I got the inspiration to write this chapter from that song.

I'm open for suggestions!

7. Dreaming alone

Summary for the Chapter:

Steve finally gets out of the hospital and things are starting to be bright for the both of them. Though they may be in a new setting, the demons that reside in Steve's mind were still the same.

Steve has a habit of fooling himself too much.

Notes for the Chapter:

The file where I put my plot sequence was missing (I guess I might have deleted it by accident since I'm always half-awake) and so I had to write this on gut feeling again. I plan to rewrite a whole new plot sequence just so I can write a little bit faster.

I wish I had more creative juices than this.

David didn't expect Steve and Billy to be awake the time he got back to the hospital at 6am that day. He had expected the boys to be fast asleep, not arguing over some 80's music. They were both sitting on Steve's bed, completely submerged with their conversation with Billy swinging his arms around and calling Steve names that weren't pleasant to listen to. Though to Steve's credit, it didn't faze him. David found that utterly weird.

“Hey you both.”

Billy turns his head first, putting his arms down as he realize that they weren't alone anymore.

“Hey Chief.” He says in such familiarity that David was almost

convinced that the blond had been calling him chief all his life.

“Morning.” The boys nod and say their greetings. “Feeling better Steve?”

“Yeah. Never better.” Steve manages a small smile, still weary around him it seems.

“I’ve talked to the doctor and he says you’re free to go. Don’t worry about medical bills, Owens covered it for now. When we get out of here, we’re going to talk, alright? Probably over breakfast with Natalia, Charlie and my daughter.”

It surprises Steve that David had a daughter in this timeline. He may have expected that everything was the same as 1984 but turns out, not everything.

“Finally! Some food.” Billy rouses. He gets up from Steve’s back and stretches, to which Steve watches Billy’s back, the cloth on his back crumpling to define his back muscles.

Shit, I really should stop staring. Steve scolds himself. He turns his gaze to David, who grins at him. Damn, he was caught red-handed.

The process of getting dressed was longer than signing papers. Billy had to help Steve get a clean shirt on and it was the most agonizing moment of Steve’s life when Billy also had to help him put on pants. Billy grinned all the while, clearly enjoying himself to which Steve didn’t understand. What was enjoyable about dressing up a grown man like him? Those thoughts aside, Steve really liked the fabric of the clothes he was wearing, especially the pants. Denim before hurt to be in but in these, Steve could sleep in them.

It was sunny outside, something Billy enjoyed and they were seated in a restaurant somewhere downtown when Steve noticed a number of people staring at them. Then he realized, they were staring at Billy, specifically his hair.

Of course people would stare, Billy was sporting a mullet, a hairstyle trending from the 80s, and he was in fact... attractive.

You really should stop thinking that, Harrington! Steve had scolded himself again. Just where were these thoughts coming from?!

Not a moment too soon, Natalia and Charlie walk in the restaurant. It was at that moment, Steve got a good look of Natalia. Unlike the brunette that Steve had grown to know, this timeline's Nancy, was blonde. She had bangs that complimented her face beautifully and if Steve could have the chance again, he'd do everything in a heart beat to be Nancy's better half again. But even in this timeline, Jonathan won.

Steve moves to sit next to Billy as the couple take the seats opposite to them. Charlie smiles at the gesture and greets them a good morning. As they waited for David to come back with their order, Natalia notices that people were chancing glances their way too. It also hits her that they were glancing at Billy like a sore thumb. Steve didn't stand out much since his hair was quite adorable to begin with but Billy's blond curls attracted some weird attention.

"People are staring at you." She casually says to him. Billy looks up from his drink and raises an eye brow.

"Why?" It was an innocent question but, Steve couldn't stop himself from laughing especially when he spared a glance at Charlie, who was doing the same. They both laughed.

"It's your hair, doofus. You stand out." Steve says.

"What's wrong with my hair? Ladies dig this hairstyle." Billy runs a hand through his hair. He blows on a stray strand of blond curl which doesn't do much. At most, Steve thinks it's adorable.

"In this year, it doesn't." Charlie supplied. That earned him a strange look from Billy.

"What am I supposed to do with it then? This is what's "in" in Hawkins last 1984. I didn't know I was going to be transported 33 years into the future." Huffs Billy. He prided his hair if he was being honest. It what attracted the girls in Hawkins. Not to mention his tan complexion.

David decides to join them shortly after. Beside him was his daughter, which resembled Eleven except she had shoulder brown hair and looked happier than Steve could remember. He had to remind himself that these people only look the part, they weren't actually the same people he knew back in 1984. But somehow, at the back of his mind, he believed that they were somehow connected with the people he knew back in his timeline.

"This is my daughter, Millie. Say hi." David smiles. It was the first time Steve sees the Chief smile and he felt happy for the older man.

"Hi." Says Millie timidly. Steve holds his hand out for a shake and she takes it, giving him a small smile which he returns.

"Steve Harrington. Nice to meet you, Millie."

"Nice to meet you too, Steve."

"Billy Hargrove." Billy shakes her hand but wasn't as interested as Steve was. He notices the way Steve lit up the moment Millie came into sight and it gave him an uneasy feeling.

They all sat around the table as their orders came in simultaneously. For the first minute, they ate in silence save for Steve and Billy moaning at how good the food tasted. This kind of luxury didn't exist before. It was usually just burgers or KFC or whatever mothers in the neighborhood could make. Steve almost convinced himself that he could stay here just because of the food in his mouth.

Natalia giggled at them and Steve found it endearing. 33 years later and he still has a soft spot for Nancy, at least in this case, her look-alike.

Friendly chat loomed in their table. Billy had asked what were those devices Charlie and Natalia were fiddling with yesterday and they showed him their matching iPhones. It took Steve and Billy by surprise as the couple showed them how it worked. Even Millie brought her phone out to show Steve its contents. It was even more fascinating when Charlie taught them about a "selfie" feature that neither of the boys ever heard of. It was both an awkward and funny experience for them both as Charlie demonstrated what a selfie was by holding his phone up and taking a picture of them all.

"So it captures the moment in real time and then... what?" Billy was the one throwing question after question. The device really interested him.

"It automatically saves the photo in its memory bank so you can upload it in the internet, on social media or print it for later." Natalia explains. She had taken a few selfies with Steve at this point and Steve couldn't be happier to share a moment with Nancy's look-alike.

"Internet? Social media?" Billy was getting confused as they went on. "How advance are you guys?"

"More advance than you think. If computers in the 80s were big

boxes, today they've become compact and more reliable. This phone, our iPhone, you can consider this a computer on-the-go. It can do almost everything from making files to sending them. If you want to send someone a message, all you have to do is make an e-mail or send them a text message. Instead of going to the phone to call someone, you can just use this." Charlie holds his iPhone up like it weighed nothing. "Dial in their number and you can call anyone, anywhere. That's just a few of the many things it can do. Wonderful, isn't it?"

"Wow. I need to get one of these. Everyone has them." Billy notices the majority of the people in the restaurant had phones in their hands. Everyone seemed to be tapping into something somewhere.

"We'll get you guys some when we've come to terms with some things." David intervenes. "I still need to confirm your identities and from there, we'll work around it." Millie sat straighter next to him and waited. "So far, Billy's from California, age 18, 178cm in height and so far... no record in any data base. Steve's just as big as a mystery as you considering that he's from Hawkins already." This makes David sigh.

"Uhh... I really can't help you guys on that if I'm not on any data base. The only data I can actually give you are on my license but... I think I haven't brought my wallet when we got sucked in this plane? Billy was so busy ambushing me with snow that I've forgotten to take my necessities with me when I woke that day. I..." Steve felt dejected. He felt as if he was some error in this equation.

"You'll just have to take our word for it." Billy butts in.

"Well, I somewhat believe you both. I went to Owens this morning and he had told me some fascinating news about you guys."

This gets everyone's attention. They all sit up straight and face David. Billy stabs his fork on Steve's plate and steals a bacon. Normally, Steve would have complained but, he wasn't really in the mood to eat especially that David brought news.

"This morning, around 4, Owens' men had picked up a frequency asking for a Steve Harrington and Billy Hargrove. He calls himself Jim Hopper." Steve almost gasps at this point but Billy looks at him funny which shuts him up. "What he and Billy said match. Something about the Upside Down and a girl named Eleven. He had instructed us to take care of you both until they find a way to take you back to your world. Nancy also said to take better care of yourself, Steve. Something about the eating enough and sleeping too much."

Natalia picks up something from that. Looking at Steve now, for a guy who's 5'9 tall, Steve was kind of lean and looked pretty pale.

Steve doesn't notice the way Natalia looks at him. His focus was on David as he continues to relay messages from their friends from 1984.

"Dustin also said something about being a son of a bitch for going missing." It makes Steve laugh and he realizes how much he misses the kid. "Jim tells me it was a risk to contact us especially with Eleven having no idea where to search first. It took them a long while to pin you down and when she did, she was too exhausted to even speak during the short conversation we had this morning. I guess your friend Eleven is resting now because we tried contacting the channel again but nothing picks up. We'll wait again for them to call or something. So I've decided." David looks at Millie, who nods in silent agreement. "You guys will stay in the condo unit I have provided. We'll get you set up here, make fake accounts and data for the time being, and let you both live your senior year here. Hopefully, it doesn't take that long for them to find a way to rescue you."

Billy couldn't believe what he was hearing right now. Did they really believe all that bullshit about the Upside Down and Eleven? He still found it hard to believe in after 3 days, after spending a few hours in the Upside Down yet these guys are just going to take it in?

"I know that look." David says, as if he read Billy's mind. "You think we believe too easily."

"Uh..."

"Don't worry kid. We have our fair share of supernatural happenings. You should meet his brother." David points at Charlie, who just smiles at them, keeping his mouth shut so the surprise doesn't get ruined.

"Will?" Steve tries. Maybe Will was named Will here too.

"Noah, to be exact. It's best if you just meet him later."

"Can I come with them, Dad?" Millie turns to David who looked like he was contemplating whether to allow her or not. Steve didn't have an idea how their relationship worked in this timeline but it seems that it was better than the one in his time. David gave off the fatherly love Steve only saw in other families.

"As long as Charlie drives you back before dinner." The older man smiles. Millie smiles back at him and hugs him tight. An image that Steve still hasn't understood for years now.

"Then what are we waiting for?" Charlie stands up. "Let's go."

And they file out the restaurant. David separates from them, giving Millie one last hug before getting in his patrol car. Steve and Billy follow them to the parking lot where a number of cars were parked a few feet away from one another. They stop at a SUV car which takes Steve's breath away. It looked glorious with its shiny paint job and size. He had no idea what it was called but Steve was sure he was in love.

"Oh god wow. That's one beautiful car."

Charlie feels proud. He unlocks his car and everyone gets in his Toyota Highlander. Of course, Natalia sits at the front seat while the remaining three gets on the back seat.

It was even more magnificent inside that Steve literally swoons.

"The aircon even works." Steve exclaims, laughing at how silly he sounded. Natalia couldn't pass the chance to take a video of Steve swooning over Charlie's car. "Oh my god, I love this car. Natalia, would it be okay if I steal your man so I can sit on his car?" Everyone, except Billy, erupts into laughter.

"It's not that impressive Steve." Charlie tried to be modest but with company from the past, his car was indeed impressive.

"No shush Charlie, I'm taking you home. I hope Natalia doesn't mind sharing." Steve winks at the video. It causes Natalia to laugh even harder.

"Sure Steve, you can take Charlie anywhere. He needs to go to places anyway." Natalia giggled.

As the short drive went on, Billy couldn't understand the suddenly feeling of uneasiness that washed over him whenever Charlie glanced at them from the front mirror. If his mind could talk, it would have been cursing Charlie by now. To Billy, his name may be different but he was still the Jonathan he assumed he was. He didn't like the way Charlie made Steve happy or giddy about his car. It simply didn't sit well with his stomach.

Once upon a time, Billy Hargrove may have wanted Steve to be impressed with his Camaro but they ended up being enemies instead because Billy had pushed the wrong buttons, had been an asshole than a friend. He had heard great stories about Steve from Tommy and Carol but ever since Steve met Nancy, the King Steve they once knew vanished. It was like he was replaced by a whole new person entirely. Tommy knew that Steve had always been nice, he'd seen Steve exhibit such kindness with him and Carol, that's why they stuck with him, but at the same time, Steve had the air of arrogance around him too, like he wanted to fit in the cool kids which was actually easy for Steve to do since he didn't care about anyone at all. When Nancy came, when Jonathan bashed his face, that's when Steve started to change. He had called out on Tommy and Carol's rudeness more than once that Tommy had enough and it lead to a fight.

Ever since then, Steve never approached them again. It only proved that "uncaring" side of Steve Harrington existed. That was something Billy wanted to see for himself. He wanted to see a selfish Steve Harrington, the guy he completely missed because Nancy Wheeler changed him.

But as Billy sat in that car and listened to Steve yap about the improvements in Hawkins and how excited he was to meet other people, he had started to doubt himself on why he approached Steve in the first place. This is why Steve annoyed him. Steve cared now and Billy, unfortunately, was starting to care too.

They reach a one-story house somewhere close to the woods, close to where Steve's house would be if they drove further. Unlike the house Steve remembered, in front of them stood a bright painted house with flowers growing at its lawn. The area was greener than he pictured in his mind. There was a fence now too. At the other side of the fence, numerous puppies ran around barking softly as they chase

chickens around. Steve found it adorable that he didn't wait for Charlie to open the fence gate. He immediately went in and a pack of puppies ran up to him, running around his feet.

“Oh god.” He gasped, taking one small puppy from the ground and hugging it close to his chest. “I've never seen this many puppies in one house. They yours Charlie?”

“Oh no, the puppies are Noah's. Mine's inside, probably asleep in the kitchen.” Charlie explains. He and Natalia were holding on grocery bags as they walk past Steve to enter. “You should come inside and meet my brother. Mom will be home soon too.”

They all went in with Billy stalking behind. He was still deep in his thoughts when they reached the living room where they found Will, Noah in this timeline, lying on the floor with a dozen puppies lying on top of him.

“Noah, we have guests.” Charlie says.

“Mmokay.” Says the boy on the floor groggily.

“Hey Noah.” Millie greets. She takes the puppies off of him and pulls her friend up from the floor with a smile. “We have new friends with us today.”

The bowl-cut Will Steve knew looked different than he pictured.

Why are you even surprised, Steve? This is 2017! Of course they have a different definition of haircuts and fashion. Steve reminds himself.

Noah had a clean cut that showcased his eyes more and Steve was sure this boy made hearts, from both sexes, swoon. Noah had an easy smile on his face as he approached him with a hand extended out.

“I was expecting you guys. I'm Noah. It's nice to finally meet you Steve Harrington.”

Steve's eyes widen. Had Charlie told him about them already? What did he mean that he was expecting them?

Holding the puppy with one hand, Steve took Noah's hand to shake. He smiles back as Noah's smile grew wider.

“And you must be Billy Hargrove.” Now Noah turns to Billy, who was staring quite intensely at the other. It only occurred to Steve that Billy had been silent ever since they got in the car.

“Please to meet you kid.” Billy says curtly.

“You shouldn't be jealous of my brother. He doesn't mean to take his attention away.” Noah says as if he was reading Billy's mind.

It makes Steve raise his eyebrows as he looked from one person to another who were currently present in the room. Millie was grinning yet she offered no answer. She simply glanced at Noah and giggled.

“Wait, what's going on?” Steve asks, holding the sleeping puppy closer to him now. “Billy's jealous of what?”

“None of your business, Harrington.” Billy

dismisses. Something told Steve that Billy was hiding something that he didn't want Steve to know in chances that he might use it against him.

“Don't tease them Noah!” Charlie yells from the kitchen.

They all walk to the kitchen to find Charlie and Natalia putting groceries away. The whole place was different from what Steve and Billy remembered. The kitchen was painted in bright colors. The counters were clean and shiny while the floor was carpeted, save for the kitchen. It wasn't as clustered and dimmed that Steve had grown accustomed to during the times they spent a few nights in the Byers house in the past. The house now was very welcoming and Steve would have love living in a cozy home rather than his big, old, empty house in 1984.

“Sorry about that guys. Noah here can somewhat read minds and predict the future though it would usually be vague. He was the one who told us that new people were going to appear in Hawkins. That must be you two.” Charlie assumes but he had a feeling in his gut that Noah meant someone else entirely.

“Wait- Whoa, what? You have psychic abilities?” Steve asks. The whole lot of them had opted to sit on the stool chairs as another conversation was starting.

“I guess you can say that. But in this time? People don't really believe me. Like my brother said, I see them vaguely. I can't get names or locations right nor can I give accurate data so it's usually just a gut feeling for me and my brother. it's just surprising that it's actually true this time around.” Noah explains. At this point, Millie was busy tapping away from her phone while Natalia was heating up water for coffee.

“How'd you get your abilities?”

“During one of Chief's visit at the Hawkins Lab, I may or may not

have been exposed to one of their experiments. At first, we thought I was only electrocuted but it turns out I got a few abilities from it like mind reading, vague premonitions and seeing figures no one else could. Sounds crazy right?”

It was one of those moments that Steve couldn't believe what he was hearing. It was like listening to the kids explain about Eleven all over again where his mind chose not to process the words coming out of their mouths and instead asked for a proof instead.

“Can you read my mind then?” Steve tries to think of something for Noah to read but his mind must be fucking with him because he's thinking about how nice Billy's clothes were on him.

Suddenly, Noah laughs. Steve covers his face with his hands and hides his face from everyone as he felt a blush creep its way to his cheeks. *So embarrassing!* He scolded himself. Out of all the things he could have thought, it had to be Billy.

“Don't worry Steve, your secret is safe with me.” Noah winks.

“Please no. It was just a thought. It meant nothing.” Steve was completely in denial of the feelings he knows were starting to develop. He just wished it didn't lead to that kind of feeling or he's fucked.

“Hey, it all starts with a thought.” Noah laughs again.

Steve could feel his heart skip a beat at the implication. He tried not to let it get through him but as he chanced a glance at Billy, the blond was staring at him, quite intensely too and it made his chest warm a little. Steve could totally feel his stomach do somersaults.

“Boys! I'm home!” yells a female voice from the front door.

Charlie and Noah immediately got off their seats and ran up front where they met with their mom. They took one bag from her and laid it all on the kitchen islands.

“Oh hello there. New friends?” Joyce look-alike asks her sons.

“This is Steve and Billy mom.” Charlie points who is who as they shook hands. “The ones from Noah's dream.”

“My, you both look like you came from the 80s. I'm Winona.” She smiles at them.

“Our mom works at the salon downtown so if you need a cut, she's the person to approach.” Noah supplies.

“I could give you both a trim if you want, free of charge.” Winona smiles. She eyes Steve's hair and her smile just widens.

At the mention of hair trims, Steve physically paled. He had been growing his hair out because Nancy had told him that she loved his overgrown hair and it made him happy that Nancy found him attractive for it. Looking at his junior photos didn't exactly please him. He looked like a dork in it and he wanted nothing more but to burn the image of his younger self. How dorky can he get?

“I'd love to get a haircut Mrs. Byers.”

Everyone in the room turned to look at Billy whose statement shocked them all. It shocked Steve the most because the high school populace went crazy for Billy's mullet in their time. Right now, hearing him tell Mrs. Byers how he wanted a haircut gave Steve shivers. Would Billy really cut his curls?

This news, however, makes Mrs. Byers light up.

“What hairstyle do you want me to do?” she asks, walking around to get a closer look on Billy's hair.

“As clean as Noah's. I wanna try living in this moment.” That seemed to please Mrs. Byers because she cups Billy's face, which surprises him, and gives him a big smile.

“Let's get you fixed up before lunch.”

And they were moving out of the kitchen. Steve watched as everyone filed out of the room into the garage where most of Mrs. Byers equipment were placed. A few minutes later, Steve joins them watch as Billy sit on a stool. Mrs. Byers gets to work fast because in less than a minute, Steve had already heard snipping. There was a determination in Billy's eyes as he looked down on the curls falling on the floor, as if he was saying goodbye to an old image he had grown into. Steve wasn't sure if it was a good thing but as Billy's hair get shorter, the more he held on to his breath.

“Well would you look at that.” Natalia comments. She takes her phone out and snaps a photo. “He's looking more handsome by the minute.”

“You think he's handsome?” Charlie asks. Noah turns his head to the couple and grins, waiting for a response from Natalia.

“Well, yeah. Don’t you think he’s handsome Steve?” Big blue eyes turned to him. He wasn’t sure if he would admit it out loud but he wanted to.

From the mirror where Billy was watching himself, he could see the expression Steve wore the whole time his hair was being snipped. The brunet looked worried. It was an expression Steve wore so well at the halls of Hawkins High school. Billy could never forget that face since he always saw it on a daily basis, always wondered why Steve always seemed down.

A spot of red catches Billy’s eyes. Not too long, he hears Steve groan and Charlie’s already at his side. His arm was bleeding again and it meant that Charlie had to clean the wound and wrap it with new bandages. Billy wanted to be the one to do it, as a friend and as the cause of the injury, he felt obliged to do it but it was at the moment that he realized he was good at nothing but hurting people.

“Oh dear... Maybe you should take him to the living room and get him fixed up? We’re almost done here, we’ll meet you in the living room.” Mrs. Byers said.

Charlie and Natalia nod in agreement and takes Steve to the living room with the preteens tailing behind them. Billy watches as Steve leave his sight. That’s when he releases a sigh he didn’t know he was holding.

“You seem troubled.”

“Just can’t help but feel responsible for his injury.” Billy confesses. No one knew them anyway, might as well tell a stranger. Besides, no one else was going to know about it and it was definitely not going to

reach the people they left.

“What happened to him anyway?”

Snip. Snip.

“You won’t believe me if I told you.” Billy finds himself grinning. How many times had he told people that sentence?

“I live with a psychic boy. Tell me. It might help you lift some burden.”

They look at each other's eyes through the mirror and Billy almost decides against it but he, as hard as he tried and as stubborn as he can get, he knew when to let up. So he tells Winona what happened to them, starting from the night they celebrated Christmas in Steve’s house. From there he worked it up to the point he woke up in a familiar place with unfamiliar people. Winona would glance at him from the mirror from time to time as the story progressed, probably checking if he was telling the truth or just pulling her leg. But his expression told her otherwise so she remained silent and listened.

“We didn’t really got along. I was the new kid in town and people told me I took Hawkins by storm with how cunning I was. I’d like to think it was that but I was just being an asshole, just wanted to make a name for myself. Steve was the top kid before me and I guess I found him a threat even though he doesn’t bother enough to bat an eye towards me. Maybe that’s what set me off because I was so used to people giving me attention. Steve was different. He scoffed me off and was always tailing Nancy, Natalia in this time, and it pissed me off. What was so great about Steve that he could ignore me like that? Everyone else was singing my praises, telling me that I could easily overthrow Steve’s reign but turns out, Steve had already stepped down long ago. All I heard were stories then and maybe I was just

lost. Maybe I wanted to a restart with him because he looked really cool, not giving a fuck what the whole high school body thought about him.”

Winona didn't notice that she was nodding along his rant. She may not know both boys that well but she can see and feel Steve wasn't as bad as people make him to be based on Billy's story. If she was going to guess, Steve actually seemed pretty sweet. She saw his face morphed into a million expressions when he heard that Billy wanted a haircut. In this time, she would think that Steve had something going on for Billy but it was too early to assume. Besides, they were still teenagers. She was once a teenager and she made decisions and felt things out of the moment.

“And we're all done!” she announces, taking off the protective cloth off of Billy and brushing stray hair off his neck.

It takes Billy a while to process the face that looked back at him from the mirror. His locks were gone, there was a breeze behind his neck and he looked so... good. He smiled at his reflection, ran a hand through his short hair and winked. Short hair really suited him and Mrs. Byers did a good job making him look good. He didn't look like the old Billy from the 80s and it made him feel great.

“Thanks.” He says to Mrs. Byers. They share a smile before Mrs. Byers told him to see if Steve was okay now.

As he walked back to the living room, everyone turned their heads to see the outcome of Billy's haircut. Millie was the first to react. She gasped and put a hand over her mouth as she stared, making sure this was the same person she saw earlier. The rest had smiles on their faces, save Steve who couldn't actually see him since he was lying

down the couch as Charlie finishes the wrap over his newly cleaned wound. The brunet mutters his thanks before sitting up and looking at Billy.

The new Billy literally took his breath away.

If he was handsome before, now Billy was thrice that. He looked like he belonged in this time with the new haircut that Steve was starting to consider having a haircut himself. But that would mean that he'd be moving on from the past where he was comfortable in. The idea scared him. What if he forgot about the old him?

Steve had been staring, the was blaring obvious but Billy stared back and it somehow held Steve in spot.

Electricity.

The kind that felt good and hurt at the same time. Steve was feeling that. That kind of electricity meant it was going to be a bumpy ride for him.

"You're staring, Steve." This time, Steve had no excuse for staring. He simply just want to appreciate what's in front of him.

"You alright, Steve?" Mrs. Byers had come to join them once again.

"Y-yeah..." Steve decides to tear his gaze from Billy at that point. If he had stared any longer, it might have become too obvious that he liked looking at Billy.

The events before they had lunch were uneventful. Winona, Natalia and Billy decided to join forces in the kitchen while they instructed

the others to go have fun in the living room. There, Noah, Charlie and Millie excitedly took turns in explaining to Steve how things worked in 2017. They started with what they could see in the living room. Upon stepping in the Byers residence, Steve had been curious about the big, flat, black slab of glass on the wall adjacent of the couch. Noah goes on to explain that it was their version of television but instead of the tube types they used in the 80s, they used LED now. To demonstrate, Noah turned it on and flipped through channels. At first, Steve recoiled from the sudden flashing of lights. The "high definition" feature, as Charlie continues for Noah, usually caused migraines for people who weren't used to its specs. Steve understood. His head was pounding as he watched through Noah flip through channels. Millie on the other hand, had taught Steve on the basics of how to use a phone. He had explained to them that there were mobile phones in the 80s but they didn't do much unlike the mobile phones that they had today.

"So Steve, what are your plans so far?" Charlie and Steve were now left in the living room. Both Millie and Noah had left to see if they can help around the kitchen.

Steve ponder at the question for a while. Honestly speaking, he hadn't thought about the possibility that Billy and him were to going to stay for a while. He had somehow managed to convince himself that he and Billy would be back to their time in a week or shorter. Now that Charlie had given him the idea of the possibility that they might need to stick around for a while, Steve felt his stomach tie in knots from thinking of the unknown.

"I actually don't know what we're going to do. What day is it right now?" Steve asks. Maybe he can think of something when he actually knows what date it was and where exactly they were.

"It's the 16th of July, sunday. Why do you ask?"

"Oh. I was just wondering about school that's all. Billy and I are in the senior year and I just... can't help thinking about college. I wasn't doing very well in school because of..." He couldn't tell Charlie about the reoccurring nightmares.

It all started with Jonathan beating him up a year before the babysitting. It advanced from getting beat up by Jonathan to death, to getting chased by a full-sized demogorgon and the last being shot to death. The last one had been a past trauma when Steve was younger, he hadn't grown over it but as he grew older, he learned to just let nightmares be nightmares. The important thing was that he was alive and he wasn't going to let those nightmares affect him. He still had a lot to prove to himself.

"Anyways, I wouldn't want to be out of loop from education. I really want to go to college and have a better future." It makes Steve chuckle because he hadn't really thought about his future in great detail. But there was one thing sure about his future: he wasn't staying in Hawkins.

"I see. Well, if you guys aren't sure of how long you'll be stuck here, maybe you can attend high school. Natalia and I in the senior year too. Maybe we can all go together." Charlie gives Steve a smile. They hadn't been friends for a long time but he felt he could trust Steve.

"I like that idea... I'm kind of curious how Hawkins High look this time around."

Despite the nice thoughts Steve tried to feel his head, there was still that nervousness he felt deep in his gut. He may not show it but, he thought about the people he might see in this time of Hawkins. He thought about the feeling of meeting the same people he had met in his timeline, whether good or bad. Many of them were bad and it still left him feeling nervous despite knowing that this wasn't the same place he was used to. This was a nicer place compared to

the Hawkins he grew up in. There was only one person he was really terrified of meeting.

He didn't want to meet his father in this timeline.

Simply put, his father was an asshole but Steve usually just shrugged it off. Whatever happened in their home, it remained there. He didn't tell anyone about the condition of living in his house. That would mean opening to people and Tommy and Carol weren't people Steve would love to share his life with. He didn't like to be judged and those assholes were the most judgmental people Steve has ever met. Sometimes he wondered why he was friends with them. Of course he knew why. They didn't care when he didn't care. They were like fake friends. They only talked about the small things, things that other people would consider boring but enough to keep a conversation going. Usually, Steve would like Carol run her mouth off but Tommy somehow makes it manageable, getting Steve involved in their conversations.

Besides, Steve had learned to put his attention on things that mattered. Things like Nancy and college. He knew it was too late to salvage his grades but it was better than nothing. He had been improving all thanks to Nancy but, ever since the days, weeks that led to that faithful night at the Byers house, Steve was failing again. Both in school and in life that the hopelessness he felt was too much, it suffocated him. It was the same helplessness he felt before Nancy.

Nancy made things better for him.

But Nancy also made a lot of things worse for him.

Thoughts, dark thoughts had ingrained themselves deep in Steve's mind that sometimes these thoughts would keep him up at night. Sometimes, it would distract him long enough to get into small accidents whether at home or at school and Steve found it hard to concentrate on most things when there were voices telling him to do this and that or telling him not to do this and that. It was total chaos in his mind. Steve was even surprised he could keep a straight face and laugh with Nancy and Jonathan even though it still hurt to see her with him. He had come to accept that this was going to be how he was going to live. Steve knew it wasn't normal but who could he ask for help? The guidance counselor at school? Yeah right, over his dead body. He didn't want anyone knowing he was going through such mental thoughts. That wasn't something teenagers do. They didn't go through self-sabotaging thoughts like Steve does. They went to parties and had fun, something Steve tried to get back into. If anyone knew that Steve Harrington was having dark thoughts, they would laugh at him for being weak.

Billy had done a great job of that and Steve didn't want another person pushing the wrong buttons.

Thinking about it now, Steve was surprised at the realization that Billy hadn't made his life hard for a while. Were they really friends now or were just caught up in the moment? Would Billy go back to being the asshole he is when they've finally settled in this timeline?

Steve turns his head to the kitchen and watches the blond's back. Billy was busy chopping something up while Winona and Natalia were at the stove, mixing something.

Just the image of Billy cooking right there calmed Steve.

Was it enough to say that Billy had changed for the good? Now that they were in a different place? Can Steve really trust him with things that might transpire between them in the future?

Steve hoped so.

He really hoped this time that it'll be different.

Notes for the Chapter:

As I mentioned before, chapter titles are song titles. This time it's "Dreaming alone" by Against the Current ft. Taka of One Ok Rock (man I love these bands!). This chapter is all about Steve dreaming, literally and figuratively, about the possibilities and the things that kept him up at night.

About the plot twist:

I wrote it like this to experiment, to be honest. Steve and Billy's timeline/universe is different from the one they got themselves into. In this version of Hawkins, they don't exist at all. I did the math and if I were to use the same universion/dimension, they would mean Steve or Billy would be grandparents at 2017. It was either I kill them off or I wrote them to a whole new universe where no one knew about them. I chose the latter because I didn't want to kill any of them. I believe there's a room for improvement for Billy. This is a fanfic after all, so I can write them however I want within reason ;) I still want to stick to their original characters but there will be minor tweaking to align them to my story.

I'll also try to write in better detail about how the Jim and the others have successfully contacted the other dimension Hawkins. Currently watching some theory videos, reading about the usual electronic

magnetic theories about time holes and rewatching insidious... just in case.

Huhuhuhu I really have low confidence when writing. Always thought no one appreciates the things I write...

Anyways! I will try to update in a weekly basis! College has been eating most of my time (since I don't live in a dorm, I have to commute home for 2 hours etc, also takes up my time)

Thank you for the support guys ;; w ;;
I'm also open for suggestions and corrections!
I am not perfect and I appreciate help <3

8. Strangers

Summary for the Chapter:

Billy and Steve try to settle in but with the huge time gap from when they were accustomed to, things make a turn for both teens.

Notes for the Chapter:

First of all, I would like to apologize for not updating. I have been buried with Thesis and other college requirements *sobs* not to mention, I got sick often because of stress and the strikes that has been happening in the capital of my country. This I'm on my last week of vacation and thought that I might as well give an update again and start the weekly update like I used to.

aside from College and this, I have been working sideline which usually goes on until morning. It eats up a lot of time therefore I couldn't work on this fanfic as much.

After the incident a week before, Hawkins lab was never the same. It was rid of all the blood that covered the walls and floor and now smelt strongly of disinfectant. Unlike the laboratory they knew before, Hawkins Lab was nothing more but a hallow building compromising of the same scientists that worked before the incident minus the military output.

This comforted Jim as he takes Eleven and the kids with him for a supposedly "search session" for Steve and Billy. The kids had just got out from Mike's house when he took them, worry etched on their faces as he drove to Hawkins Lab, a path they never liked.

Steve's parents were livid when they found out that their only son was missing. His mother had started talking about how they should have been home more often and took care of Steve better but Steve's father looked otherwise. He was a man who had a constant frown on his face though it was quite obvious who Steve got his features from. The man had stared down at Jim as he tried to explain his fake story of how Steve went missing. He didn't like to lie because he reminded him of what Brenner and his men did to them. It hurt a lot of people like Steve who shouldn't even be involved in the first place. Talking to the Harringtons was the most frustrating thing Jim had to do the whole week. Neil Hargrove's reaction was to be expected. Max had told them stories about the man's bursts of anger and it wasn't surprising for Jim to be threatened by him. He had met a lot of men like Neil and Jim was never fazed by them.

The kids: Mike, Dustin, Lucas, Will, Max and Eleven, sat around a table filled with computers and other unidentified electronics. Jonathan and Nancy simply watched from the side. The kids seem to gravitate around the technology as they asked Owens' men what was the use of this and that. It became noisy immediately and Jim didn't appreciate the noise especially when he hadn't slept due to the stress Steve's parents gave him. Thankfully, Lucas noticed his annoyance and told his friends to quite down and act civilized, which made Max giggle.

Kids, Jim thought.

"I know it's a Saturday morning and I know you kids would rather sleep in but Owens might have a way to help us find Steve and Billy. From there, we'll think of a way to rescue them. How does that sound?"

They looked at one another, waiting for one of them to pipe up

something. When no one spoke, they all turned their gaze back to Jim and nodded.

Owens chose that time to enter the room.

Everyone sat on the available seats and waited.

"So here's my idea." Owen says.

They waste no time in making Owens plan come to life.

They spend the next 30 minutes getting on the frequency when Steve and Billy went missing. It was an easy job, even the kids could do it but they had limited time since most of Hawkins would be walking up soon therefore interference would occur more often than they'd want. The only way they could do this was start early and that's what they were trying to do.

El positioned herself next to Owen, she gave him a nod, and closed her eyes to start searching.

She had multiple electric patches on her which Owens explained as something that would help her search faster and wider. It certainly did its job because the channel they were on spikes up and a voice goes through.

"Hello?" The voice was static but it sounded really familiar.

The kids looked at Jim, who was equally as confused as them. The voice sounded like his.

"Hello? This is David Hopper of Hawkins Police District. Anyone there?"

Even more confused faces looked at Jim for confirmation. The voice had just called himself David Hopper. He was also a Hopper yet Jim couldn't offer any explanation to them.

"Uh..." Jim walks next to El and grabs the receiver. "This is Chief Jim Hopper of Hawkins Police District." Jim had no idea what to say but he was reminded of what their goal was when Max looked at him hopeful.

"Jim Hopper? This might sound crazy but do you happen to know a Steve Harrington and Billy Hargrove?" Asks David from the other line. Shuffling and murmuring could be heard from the other side but it was too vague to make out.

"Yes! Do you know where they are?" The kids crowd behind Hopper and Eleven at this point, none wanting to miss a thing.

"They're currently at the hospital, recovering. Steve is injured badly but we've stitched him up."

"What about Billy?" Max asks all of a sudden, disregarding the fact that David was talking to Jim.

"He's alright, nothing happened to him. Who am I speaking to?"

"Max, I'm his step-sister." There was relief etched on her face as the man confirmed her brother-in-law's safety. "Where are they? Are you in Hawkins?"

Max threw one question after another, ignoring the fact that Jim was suppose to ask the questions. To her credit, she did ask the important questions that Jim let her be. David answered her question with great precision, even mentioning the date and time which got Jim's eyebrows rising. Did he just say 2017?

“David, can you repeat what year it is?” Jim asks all of a sudden.

The kids all turn to him as he stepped forward close to the microphone, anticipating for David's voice to come through the intercom.

“It's to 2017. Why?”

Everyone got weird looks on their faces. Even Owens' eyes widened in surprise, looking at Jim expectantly. How was it that they were communicating with someone from the future? Not to mention the huge year gap.

“This might sound stupid but from where I am, it's 1983.” Jim still held on that hope that this David was on the same page as him.

“Steve mentioned he and Billy were from the past. I'm well aware that this is unbelievable at any level but I'm quite glad you've managed to contact us. For all we know, these two are criminals with delusional minds especially Steve whose name won't pop up in any system. That was initially my problem but fixing that would be easy.” David said.

The idea of Steve being a criminal tickled Jim's mind. The boy couldn't even defend himself against Billy and Jonathan let alone do heinous crimes? It was ridiculous but Jim had a feeling that Steve could if he tried enough. The boy had his moments when it scared Jim.

"So what's your plan?" The question leaves Jim speechless again.

He wanted nothing more but to have the teens back but imagining the place they were... Jim was wracking his brain for any solution that could work. Steve and Billy weren't simply stuck in the Upside Down, they were in a different plane of time. Though it was still Hawkins, set in the future, Jim couldn't grasp the concept that the Upside Down could do such a thing.

"I will be honest with you David... I haven't really thought far enough that these boys would end up in the future. If this was the normal "we got stuck in the Upside Down" escapade, we can rescue them in the nick of time but... it seems like they have winded up further than we expected. Though Steve is knowledgeable about the dangers of the Upside Down, as a normal teen, he sucks and so does Billy. The only thing my mind can tell you right now is let them stay with you for a while as we try to think of a way to get them back here."

There was silence after Jim had decided on behalf of everyone in the room. Chancing a glance on the kids, he saw Dustin make a forlorn face. Max was spacing out which made Jim rethink his decision. Logic was telling him that he couldn't do anything, at least at the moment, and so they needed the time to think of other alternatives to get the boys back.

"Okay. We'll also look into other possibilities of sending them back to

your time."

Pause.

"Anything you want to tell Steve and Billy?"

Dustin was the first one out of his seat as he makes a beeline for the mic, taking it from the table to speak directly into it.

"Steve please, PLEASE, stay safe. I want you to come back as soon as you're able you son of a bitch.

"Dustin!" Nancy widens her eyes as at him. "Please tell Steve to eat something." The brunette says rather worriedly.

The kids all circled the mic as they said their messages for Steve and Billy, a little laughter and bickering, a semblance of normalcy everyone needed. Jim was quite glad to hear them joke around despite the absence of the two teens. These people had grown rather close to one another and he couldn't hope for the better. They all supported each other to the best of their abilities especially Steve. The guy was everywhere Jim went.

"It's almost time." El says quietly. There was blood running down her nose now and they all knew what that meant.

"Okay guys." Jim claps his hands to get their attention. "Time to go."

There was a chill in the air and the sun was starting to set when Steve decided to sit at the front porch. Everyone else was busy doing god-knows-what inside. Steve sat on the bench silently as his eyes tried to familiarize himself in his new surroundings. Unlike the Hawkins he knew, this Hawkins didn't scare him. In fact, he hadn't felt this calm ever since he took that drive out of Hawkins a year ago, some time before he met Nancy and responsibilities.

It was a nostalgic memory yet Steve kept playing it in his mind when he had time like this. The sound of crashing waves, the smell of the sea in the air, the different hues of blues, purples, reds and oranges in the sky, Steve missed it. It was only a one day escape from his suffocating life but it felt like an eternity to him. It was a moment he wanted to live in again and again.

"What are you thinking about?" Steve turns his head to the direction of the voice and finds Natalia smiling down at him. She really was as nice as Nancy it made him miss her.

"Nothing much really. A memory just decided to bother me at this moment." He grins, returning his gaze in front of him.

"What's it about?"

"It was a time when I drove out of Hawkins. I only had a few dollars in my pocket, a heavy heart and a mind full of thoughts. I only planned on driving to the next town but I ended up driving further than I anticipated. Somehow I ended up by the ocean, got my feet wet and played in the sand. Almost felt like a little kid." Steve chuckles. "I guess I just miss the feeling of sand between my toes and the freedom."

"You want to go to the beach? We can plan for it with the others."

"I don't want to be a bother. Besides, we don't know how long Billy and I will be staying here. For all we know, we could go home tonight or tomorrow." Yet Steve didn't want to. There was something

about this Hawkins that made him want to stay.

"You know Steve..." Natalia takes the seat next to him and for a while, she just stares at his eyes. "You're not alone okay?" It confuses Steve until Natalia takes his left arm and turns it over. She looks down on the faded white lines on his wrist with a sad smile. They weren't a lot but they looked angry and one was large enough to have been cut deep. "I know we just met but if you need someone to talk to, I'm here okay?"

Steve was silent. No one really cared about this kind of things. He looked at his wrist and tried to list down how he got each scar and what was the reason behind them. All of them had a reason, mostly done during bad days. Thinking about them put a weight in his chest. His heart hurt but his brain was telling him it was a stupid each and every time.

"I'm okay Nancy- Natalia, these are all in the past anyway." He tried to convince himself but he knew better than that. There was still that undeniable pit inside his chest.

"I'm just making sure Steve. You seem like a nice guy." Natalia smiled.

"Having a heart-to-heart, are we?"

Steve pulls his arms away and hides them as Billy came to join their little party. This was something he didn't want Billy to see. Of all people, Billy was the last person Steve wanted to share his inner turmoil with. Strangers sounded better than him because they could just disappear one day but Billy was like a leech, he was there when Steve didn't want him to. Billy looked at expectantly, there was still that aura around him that screamed that they better tell him what's up or else bad things will happen.

"It's none of your business." Steve seethes.

There was that same intensity in Steve's eyes during that night they had a staring contest. Billy had been waiting for the moment to see such intensity again and he wished he knew what caused it. Steve was still a mystery to him but he took it as a challenge to uncover these mysteries. He wasn't even sure why he thought of that but looking at Steve now, after their small detour in the Upside Down, Billy feels a connection between them.

Just when Billy was about to say a reply, David's car pulls up in front of the Byers drive way. Steve pulls his gaze away from Billy and goes in. Natalia spares him a careful glance before following suit, leaving the door open for them. As David step out of his car, Billy releases a sigh he was keeping.

"What the hell just happened there, Hargrove? Drowned in those bambi eyes again? Jesus, pull yourself together!" Billy mentally scolds himself as he walked in the house just to find Steve standing by the stairs, staring into space. He wanted to snap his fingers in front of that stupid face but Charlie beat him into it.

Steve jerks from his trance, looks at Charlie than at Billy with big eyes. For a moment, Steve almost looked insane.

"You both ready?" David asks the teens. Billy nods. Steve on the other hand just stares at him as if he has grown two heads.

Billy felt a tug in his gut as they said their farewells to the Byers. As Steve walked to the pick-up, Billy kept his eyes on him. In the car, Millie and David had a conversation of their own as Billy and Steve sat at the back, complete silence between them. In all honesty, Billy wanted to ask what was bothering Steve but as he chanced a glance to Steve, he saw how the brunet stared out the window of the car with creased eyebrows. He looked like he was thinking hard about something that had no solution to.

Billy let it pass. They'd have more time when they get to this "condo"

Millie was telling them about.

The sky above was starting to turn into different hues of blue and red. It held some nostalgia Billy hadn't felt in a while. He missed California. He missed the waves of the ocean and the saltiness of the air. When the sun set, he would always be at the pier, watching as that ball of red flame leave them for the night.

The pick-up enters a beige colored building. David drives them through a series of floors half-filled with cars until they settle on a spot over-looking the park below them. From this view, Billy caught sight of Hawkins. What used to be a dump was now a thriving little town with high rising buildings here and there. Of course, the chill was still present but it seemed like it had become colder than the temperature Billy was used to.

So the four of them waded through halls, passing by doors with a numbers plastered on top of each. Basing from the numbers the rooms started with, they were in the 22nd floor. Billy couldn't believe the possibility that Hawkins had such a high building but it excited him nonetheless. If the Byers house was something he'd see himself living in, what would these doors lead to?

They stop at a door with the numbers 2204. David takes out a card from his pocket and slides it on what was supposed to be the doorknob. Instead, there was a card slot. As the door swung open, Billy couldn't help the excitement he felt as he waited for the lights to come on.

Compared to the Byers house, which he already considered small, this space was smaller. It had minimal furniture almost looking scarce but Billy was thankful for that, he didn't like cramped spaces. He walked in, following behind David and Millie who were giving them reminders of the place and how to use the appliances inside. There was a small kitchen inside next to the comfort room. The only thing that separated the kitchen and the living room was a long island that also functioned as a bar. Billy liked that concept as his

eyes darted from the different alcohols stored beneath it. As he looked through cupboards and cabinets, Steve walked to the living room area. He was surprised to see the same flat-screen TV stationed near the glass walls though the one they had was smaller compared to the one in the Byers residence but when you're from 1984, the size was still surprisingly big.

Steve stared at the closed blinds. He hated seeing artificial light, it reminded him of days when he was younger.

“Here.” David noticed Steve's worried look and took it upon himself to open the binds and pull the curtains away from the glass window.

Slowly, as the curtains parted, Steve saw the sun setting at the horizon. He took a few steps closer to the glass wall and watched Hawkins. It was a beautiful sight. Something he had never dreamed of seeing. If this was the place they were staying at for the time being, Steve loved it. Even though everything wasn't the same as he was accustomed to, he wasn't afraid to try it out. Especially now that he was in a whole different place and time. Surely enough, society had changed.

“There are two bedrooms. One has a king-sized bed, the family room, and the other having the single bed. You guys decided who gets who. Also, the heater in the bathroom takes a while to heat so it's best if you let the water run for a minute or two. Okay so...” David turned to the two teens, expectation written all over his face. “Jim told me to take care of you both while you are here. I'll be doing all the necessary steps to provide identification for you both and as I promised Jim, I'll do whatever I can to make you guys comfortable in this time. If it takes a very long time well... I can pull some strings to get you into high school.” Steve groans at the mention of high school. It seemed that he didn't have any intention of going to class nor was he expecting they were going to take a while in this timeline.

“What about groceries?” Billy pipes up. He was in front of the fridge, confused that there were only water bottles inside of them.

"Here." David hands Billy a black card which Billy inspected the moment he touches it. "It's a card, I left the passcode at the fridge. You can go buy the groceries later, get crazy but I expect you both to spend wisely. It's a Friday night so things might get crazy around town. I suggest we go shopping tomorrow for other necessities. It's getting late so Millie and I will head home now. You both behave. I left the station's number and my personal one just in case you need to reach me. With that, I bid you guys good night."

Billy and Steve followed them out, closing the door behind them as the finality of things finally sink in between the two teens. Steve had his back pressed against the front door when Billy decided it was the right time to talk about their predicament.

"You liking any of this?" Billy asks. Steve just trains his eyes at the other, trying to see through that rough surface about what was he really going on about.

"They seem nice." He walks past Billy and lays himself down the couch, eyes at the ceiling as his mind automatically went to daze mode.

"That's not what I mean Harrington."

"Says the guy who got his hair cut on the second day."

"People were staring at me!"

"Since when did you care about that? Don't you love the attention?" Steve snorts. Billy had been the sore thumb ever since his boot touched the soil of Hawkins. Billy's very existence screamed for attention.

"Where did that come from?" Billy sounded annoyed; Steve couldn't tell. He couldn't see the other's face to care. "Does that mean you've been staring, Harrington?"

I can't believe this jerk. Yes! I have been staring because of your stupid hair and eyes. Steve grumbled to himself. He was never ever going to

admit that to Billy. It'll just feed into his ego and knowing him, he'd find a way to use it against Steve at one point.

Steve had been so busy with his thoughts that he hadn't noticed Billy came to stand near him. The day had been a whole *deja vu* for Steve and he wanted nothing more than to have a quiet dinner where he didn't have to answer everything Billy throws at him. But the blond was proving it hard to get along.

"God, you're so annoying! Can we just have dinner now?" Steve grumbles. He gets up from the couch and sighs, running his hands through his untamed hair like he always does when he was frustrated.

"Tch, such a princess. Fuck, whatever. Let's go out."

Both teens grunted with frustration as they moved about the small space of the condo. Curtains were closed, lights were switched off; Billy and Steve walk out the room, making sure to lock the door despite the difficult it imposed to Steve with how advance it was. It was like elementary all over again! Steve hated not being able to figure out things.

Notes for the Chapter:

Chapter title is Stranger by Halsey. I actually cut an important scene, will be adding it to the next

this is basically just... food for the brain I guess?
nothing much to read here.